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Daniel Skjold Pedersen

**DAYS OF
WONDER**

Asger Harding Granerud

asmodee.de/deep-blue

VISIT...

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ULRICH BLUM

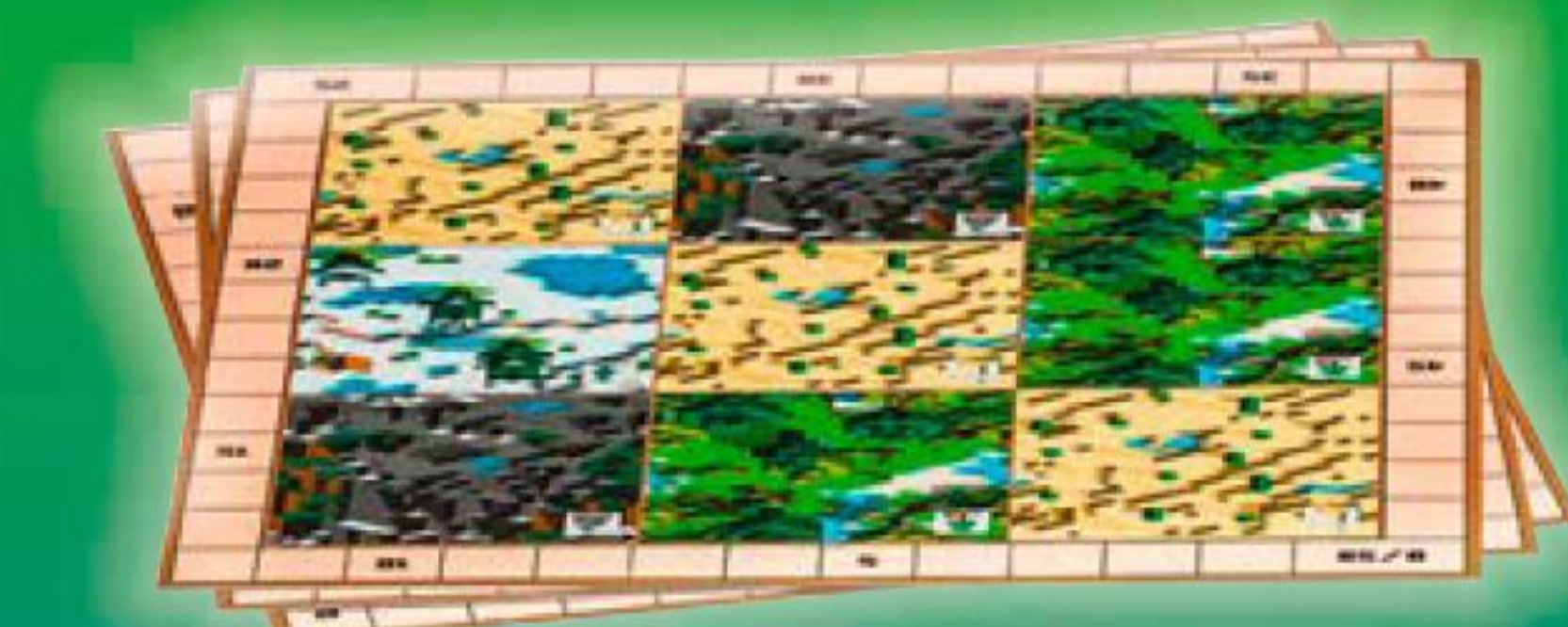
MINECRAFT BUILDERS & BIOMES

10-99

2-4

30-60
MIN

NEW



Ravensburger

Relevance and Reality

Whether there ever was a Thomas, Earl of Kellynch, is questionable, and also irrelevant. "The earl is an avid sportsman, travelling from estate to estate to hunt and ride." This much is revealed in the short description on his card in *Obsession* (see p. 38). Now, he may be thick-skulled, tone-deaf and a non-smoker, yet nothing would prevent players from inviting him to port wine and cigars in the game, to listening a chamber music recital, or to engage in a political debate. All that counts are the 200 British Pounds that he tosses into the hat every time, which makes him a very welcome addition to every social event. Even if you despise light-blue-blooded, idle snobs: Playing Dan Halligan's *Obsession* about the British gentry of the Victorian era, you run the risk of developing a knack for them. It is not far from playing the game to taking Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from the book shelf. What more could a game offer?

But maybe a game is not meant to do that. In his rating commentary on *WATER-*

GATE (see p. 36), my colleague Schrapers praises the work of designer Matthias Cramer (see p. 37) and editor Viktor Kobilke on the historical background material, and seems pleased with the relevance of the theme. At the same time, he accuses the game of lacking abstraction. This is surprising, since *Watergate* is basically a topological problem as you find in *Twixt*, combined with a tug-of-war that decides who is allowed to place the connecting tiles. It all appears very real, but the protagonists do not necessarily behave as they did back then. Alas, *Watergate* cannot be blamed for showing Richard Nixon, depending on the course of the game, as a man of honor, while the journalists Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward are hard-wired to the good side anyway. However, the sources that have the potential to unmask Nixon as a crook in the presidential chair provide an irrefutable chain of evidence that can either flow freely or dry up. The fact that this is about people "who at the time had the opportunity to make conscious decisions," as Schrapers stresses, does not

exclude every fictitious twist of the game. After all, 1830 cannot be criticized because players might even go bankrupt with the Chesapeake & Ohio if they are just dumb enough, although the real C&O managed to swallow their main competitor Baltimore & Ohio in the 1960s. What if one of the crucial witnesses against Nixon had been late for the meeting with the journalists, due to traffic congestion or a missed train? What if someone had given in to the presidential administration's attempts at intimidation and followed the wife's requests to think about the family?

A game is never a documentary, but I believe it should be allowed to resemble one. Nothing can ever be perfectly or realistically simulated with paper and cardboard alone, although wargames often claim to do so. If at all, computer games such as *Cities: Skyline* (see p. 16) could pull it off. But using the "what-if" to spark interest is also possible for games made of nothing but cardboard and paper, and that is to be welcomed wholeheartedly.

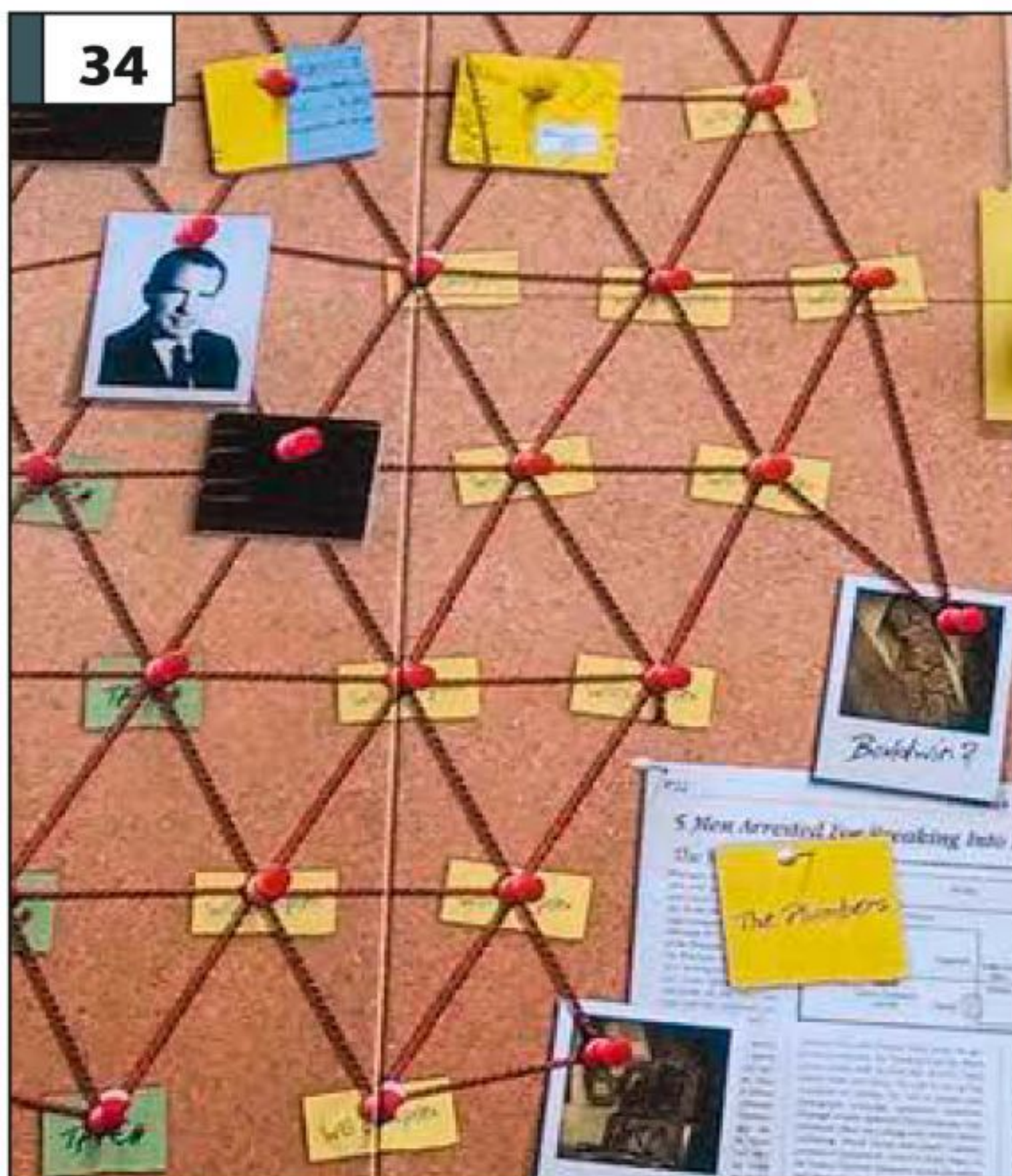
Matthias Hardel/cs





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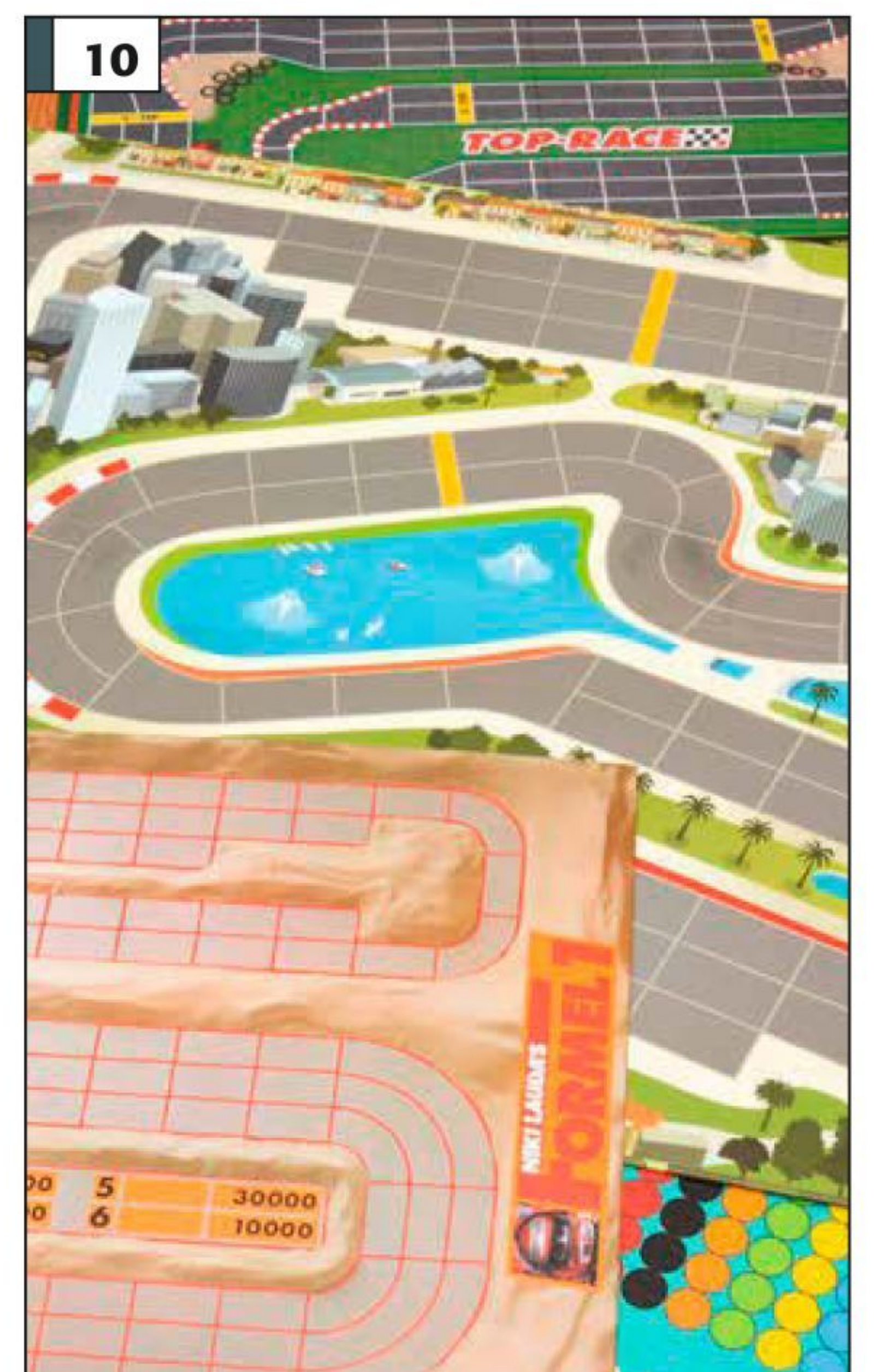
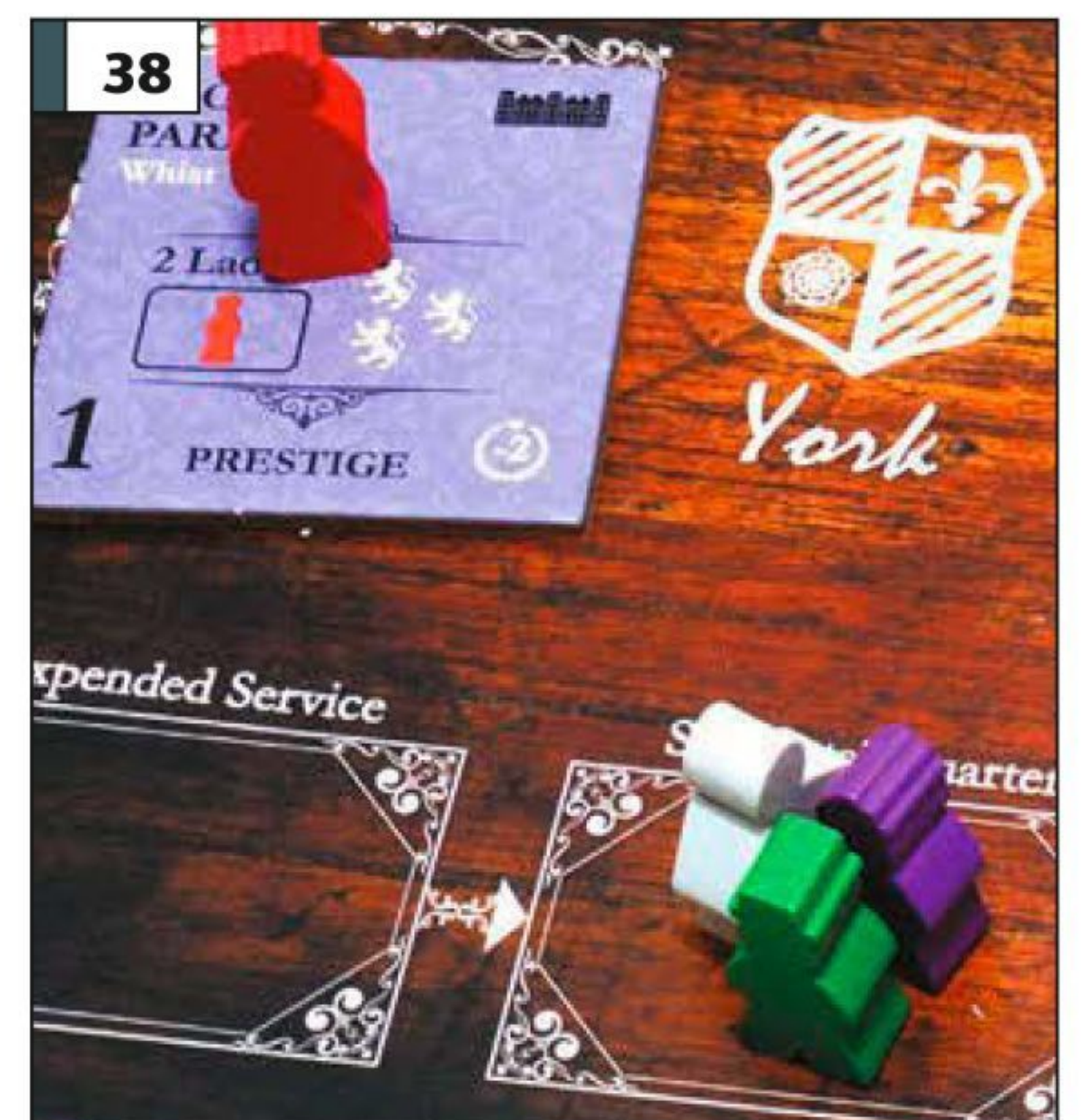
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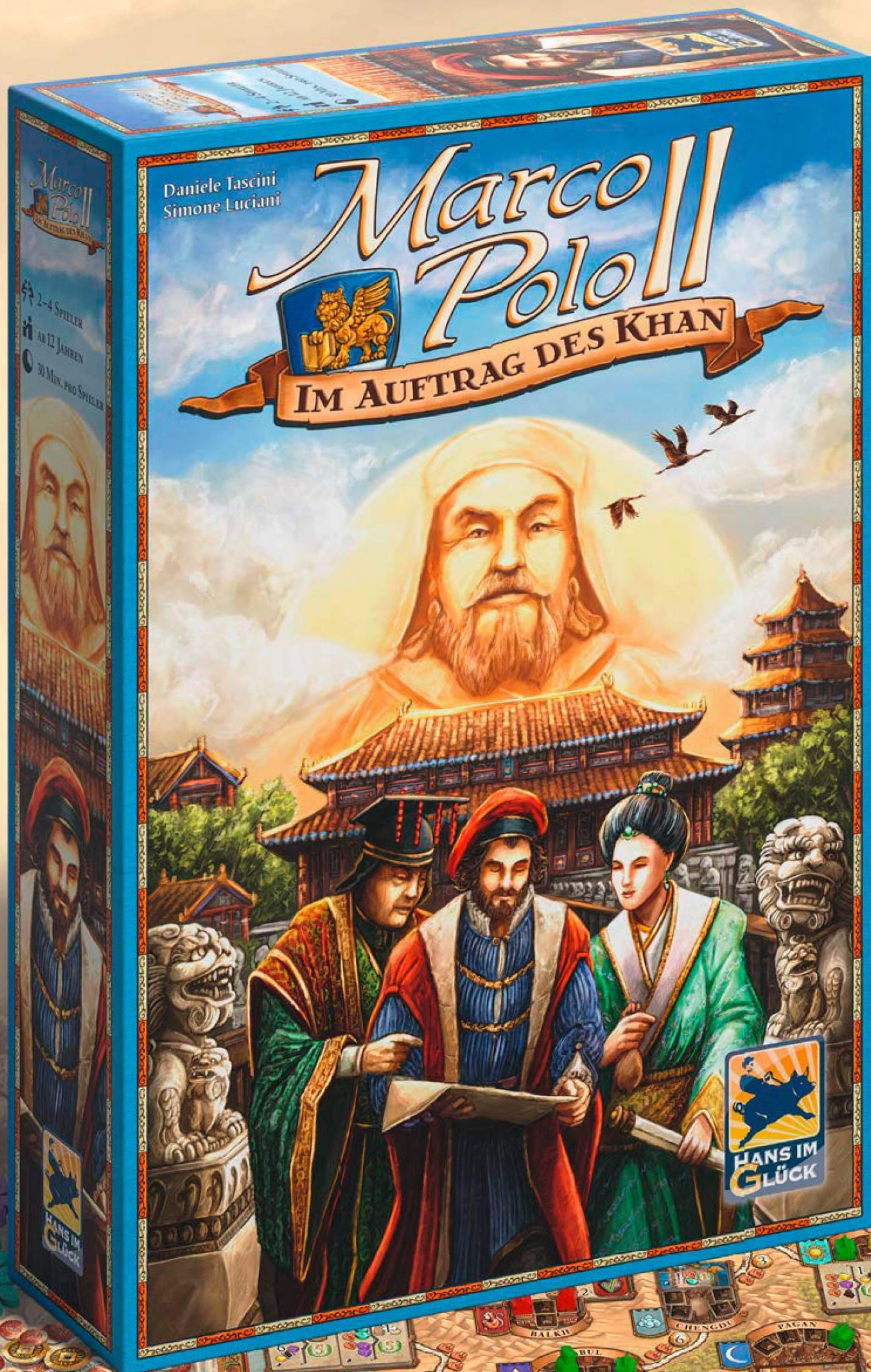
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A Good Blend of Familiar Elements

Experts estimate that there are several thousand shipwrecks resting on the ocean floors, some of them old Spanish galleons filled with gold, silver, and precious stones, and some recently-sunken ticking time bombs full of ammunition and fuel. Treasure divers explore the seabed for their bounty but now, as proudly announced in the rulebook of **DEEP BLUE**, they can also find their treasures at the gaming table with the "greatest treasure hunt of all time."

A look inside the game box reveals a trove of rich game components: a nice selection of well-modeled boats, treasure chests, plastic gems, tiles and cards. Every detail is expertly rendered in the molded parts – every game should be like this.

In **DEEP BLUE**, up to five treasure hunters compete against each other. The fact that the publisher recommends this game for players "8 years old and up" is an indication that it's not a game that relies heavily on strategy, but rather it's a family game. At the beginning of the game, 15 wreck tiles are laid out face down on the beautifully illustrated game board. These large cardboard squares will be your exploration destinations during the course of the game. Once they have been revealed, diving expeditions can retrieve the treasures.

Players each have two boats at their disposal for diving and exploring. The harbor, where

the boats sail from at the beginning of the game, is in one corner of the board. Another corner of the board houses the gem supply to add to the gems which are in a pouch at the start of the game.

One of four possible actions

Each expedition leader begins with a set of four multifunctional crew member cards. The remaining staff appear throughout the game and are placed in the market section of the board where the cards can be bought. Players decide which crew members to buy, gradually building their personal decks. And that's **DEEP BLUE**'s engine. Throughout the game, gems are added to the bag from time to time, depending on the new cards that appear in the market.

Treasures are salvaged and rewarded with victory point tokens that you stash away in your treasure chest. At the end of the game, the player with the most VPs in his chest wins.

Recruiting a new crew member from the market is one of the four actions active players can choose to carry out on their turn. They do so by discarding cards from their hand corresponding to the value of the new crew member, which can be used on their very next turn. Used crew members go to the personal discard pile.

Another action is movement. When your ship lands on a wreck tile by using the sail action with cards

showing the necessary number of boat propeller icons on his cards, you place your boat on a scouting spot on the wreck tile, if one is still available. Otherwise, you will have to make do with the blank space in the center of the tile, which – unlike the scouting spots – does not have a special advantage, but still lets you participate in the dive for treasure.

If you decide to dive – the third type of action – plunge your hand into the black cloth gem bag and pull out one gem at a time, placing each one on the dive site board.

Red, gold, and silver gems are valuable in their own right; green gems (artifacts) and purple gems (antiques) not so much. In order to collect victory points as a reward for the latter gems, you will have to recruit appropriate crew members such as the Occultists or perhaps the Archaeologists for the job.

The dive becomes dangerous when you find blue and black pieces, which represent depleted oxygen or sea monsters respectively. If you want to protect yourself against these hazards, you will need to have the right crew cards on hand or have your boat anchored at one of the appropriate scouting spots on the wreck tile.



Although other players can also be involved in the dive, only the active player, the so-called Dive Leader, gets to pull gems from the bag. After drawing each gem, all participants may use crew cards to ward off dangers or increase their VP count. However, as mentioned above, in the case of green and purple gems you might not get any points at all. The dive ends as soon as the Dive Leader decides

to ascend or is forced

decides to end the dive, he gets VPs for treasures and crew cards. The latter VPs are counted even if the dive was aborted. Regardless, the Dive Leader will also be rewarded with the VPs indicated in the center of the wreck tile.

No cut-rate quality

The last, but not least, action is resting. To carry out this action you shuffle your discarded crew cards and then draw three of them. Sometimes you need to do this action a second, and maybe even a third time if the cards you absolutely need don't come out. That said, I think that resting hampers the flow of the game somewhat and this issue should have been addressed more elegantly.

DEEP BLUE manages to always hand out victory points; sometimes more, sometimes less. And that's a great thing for a family game as it keeps frustration manageable. It even allows for boats from neighboring tiles to participate for free in someone else's dive, which further contributes to making this a good family game. Because of this the active player isn't the only player involved, and quite often everyone at the table joins in.

DEEP BLUE ends when the last of the four so-called Sunken City tiles is revealed. These special wreck tiles, showing a section of a sunken city, were placed face down on the game board somewhat more distant from the harbor at the beginning of the game. One more thing to mention is the vari-

ous "Captain's Log" scenario cards which provide more variety as each one has special rules that tweak game play.

As always, Days of Wonder, has put a lot of emphasis on beautiful components, and the materials are anything but cut-rate. The two authors, Daniel Skjold Petersen and Asgar Harding Granerud, have done a good job, even though they've drawn on several well-established elements. In this game you assemble your personal card deck, you gamble on finding treasures, and then you rejoice or suffer. Experienced gamers will certainly not be very challenged, but they can enjoy DEEP BLUE as a relaxing game at the end of the evening, a bit like a nightcap. It's an excellent choice for gaming families with eight- or nine-year-olds. *Edwin Ruschitzka/tw*



Title: Deep Blue
Publisher: Days of Wonder
Designer: Daniel Skjold Pedersen, Asgar Harding Granerud
Artist: Miguel Coimbra et al
Players: 2-5 (for two: →)
Age: about 8+ years
Duration: about 45-60 minutes
Price: about 50 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Edwin Ruschitzka	8
Christwart Conrad*	7
Matthias Hardel**	7

* Successful mechanism that increases the attractiveness of treasures. Measured against its depth, the game takes a little too long.

** Besides gambling, it's also fun to torment competitors by freeloading, whether it's sailing away with the boat or extending the dive until they turn deep blue in the face.

to do so because he can no longer protect himself from the hazards.

When hunting for treasures, players gamble and are of course reminded of CAN'T STOP, the pioneer for the press-your-luck game mechanism. The Dive Leader is faced with exciting and decisive questions like: Should I continue and hope to find more treasures, or should I stop now and avoid the dangers? If the Dive Leader



No Fuss Required

"The Crew Travels Together to the Ninth Planet", is that seriously the title of a game? But the first four words undeniably reflect exactly the feeling of the gameplay here. Only the background story with the ninth planet, which is about to replace a degraded Pluto, is too far-fetched for me.

DIE CREW is a cooperative trick taking game – nothing especially novel these days, but still not as straight forward as confrontational trick taking games. The basic rules can be explained in just one minute: Colors must be followed suit, rockets are trumps. One player also receives an additional, slightly smaller card and the task of winning its full-sized companion card. If that player already holds the matching card in hand and it shows a high number, this is really

their highest, lowest or only card of that suit.

Rudimentary communication at best

No talking, only rudimentary communication – that's pretty much the opposite of the ingredients for a cool gaming night, right? How is this supposed to be any fun? It is – if you treat DIE CREW as if it were a riddle. What do you have to do to get the

"logbook" attached to the rules. The level of difficulty increases to the need to fulfill ten task cards in chapter 47. While chapter 48 only requires three, luck determines which of them is marked by an omega symbol and has to be won in the very last trick. Chapter 49 again calls for ten tasks, with three of them delivered in a particular order, and small chips placed on the cards to keep track. And in the final, the starting player has to determine in advance who wins the first four tricks and who wins the last.

Each of these tasks is embellished with three or four narrative sentences about



quite simple. But if the card is in the hand of another player, things get more difficult. With low-value cards, it is the other way around, for they are easier to take off another player.

Although DIE CREW provides a community experience, it is by no means a communicative one; for players do not talk to each other – at least not during the games. There is only one way to communicate: each player may put one of their cards on the table and indicate with a chip whether this is

right player to capture the right card? It's a challenging task, and sometimes you will find it impossible to solve. Then you fail, and the cards are reshuffled in the hope for a better hand or a flash of genius.

Fulfilling just one task card may not seem like a major obstacle, but this represents only chapter 1 in the extensive

the astronauts' shared journey to the ninth planet. Under each section players can note down how many attempts they took to solve the puzzle. Once they have solved all 50 tasks, they will get an overall result which can then be compared with later attempts in another crew round. The logbook has space to jot down the results of six groups.



Down-to-earth in a Balloon

Several years ago, Volker Schächtele's game design debut *QUEEN'S ARCHITECT* (spielbox 5/2015) was released. Now he gets us to build again, this time whole landscapes. The scene is set among peaceful islets, but the quiet will not last, because depending on how the wind blows, it can get quite noisy around the games table.

On their personal boards, players are planning to connect six landscapes on the coast with the balloon yard in the center. If they achieve it with interconnected tiles of the same landscape type, points galore will be awarded to them. The bonuses for placed cities and monuments are also quite tempting. If possible, the island's ugly volcanoes should be covered in the end, or else they cause a considerable point deduction.

There is a lot to do, and your balloon is constantly in demand. Which is why it would be extremely useful if you could move it as you please. It will come as no surprise that this is not the case, because the wind quite often blows from the wrong direction. But since designer Schächtele thankfully provided two propellers for each balloon basket, you can at least control the movement range and even drive against the wind. However, these maneuvers cost a lot of energy, which is recorded on a track above the islands. Without energy, the balloons are at nature's mercy, so you are well advised to grab all the extra energy drops you can get – from spaces or from the dice.

From the dice? Yes, there are also dice, and if you now believe that so many randomizing elements turn *DIE INSELN IM NEBEL* into a lottery, you could not be more wrong. Used with virtuosity, they produce astonishing games – of course only if they work for you. If not, you are left to complain about the unpredictable weather, randomly drawn landscape tiles and, of course, luckier opponents.

The starting player of each round is by no means free to choose where to drift their balloon, followed by dropping landscape tiles around the vehicle at the new destination. Instead, the starting player's right neighbor

rolls two six-sided dice which determine the prevailing wind direction for the round, as well as some special effects. If the result is not to the liking of the person rolling, they can reroll once.

Most of the time, the starting player does not really get what he or she wants.

But at least they get to choose first from the two or three tiles on display. All of them have to be placed on the eye lenses above the island that represent the precious few storage spaces. Alternatively, they can discard the tiles and convert them into energy points to the value of their landscape. Only then building commences.

Ballooning requires practice

Almost all the players in my rounds initially struggled with the difference between the scoring and the mechanism that ends the game. Points are awarded for identical tiles which are connected to a coastal landscape of the same type (with jokers counting

for each adjacent area). However, you can only trigger the end and earn ten bonus points if your landscape tiles form an uninterrupted connection between all island edges and the yard in the middle – and buildings are interrupting this network. This rule is a bit tricky, but will become clear before the second round.

If you are new to the game, it is challenge, to begin with, to maneuver the balloon in the right direction to a suitable space. Tiles can be placed adjacent to the balloon but not directly on its space. The starting space of your balloon determines its movement range, and sometimes the

wind blows you to the edge of the island, where surplus movement points are simply wasted. There is only limited fun in this.

Experienced players should therefore definitely use the first of the two expansions included. If you then sail over the edge of the island after building a harbor office, you will end up in a harbor that allows you to swap your own tiles



for up to four new ones, available there for exchange. With suitable landscapes in the harbor, it is worth leaving the island full steam ahead in order to be able to exchange as many tiles as possible, even though this might prevent you from building in this round. This creates exactly that extra kick DIE INSELN IM NEBEL wants. By contrast, the limited

tiles, you get irritated when crazy dice rolls change the wind direction and you end up in an already built-up section of the island instead. In which case you have to spend a lot of energy on counter steering, energy that would have won you victory points in the end. But what if there are not even vacancies in the opposite direction?

There are those rotten days where you simply cannot get to certain parts of the island, while other players are filling everything up with tiles, only because they have steered a different course once or twice. This seems unfair, but is still tolerable in a game of less than 60 minutes. Thanks to the double-sided game board and the two energy tracks this island never gets boring anyway.

If you are looking for the next great innovation in gameplay or the perfectly implemented theme, present in every phase and with every move, DIE INSELN IM NEBEL has naught to offer. It is a laid-back tile placement game that does not try to beguile with an exuberant, superimposed story, pointless characters or overproduced components. It is unpretentious and down-to-earth, relaxed, but not without suspense. And it is nice that something like that still exists. *Stefan Ducksch/cs*

options of the basic version are somewhat unsatisfying.

Experts will soon also be adding the second expansion and then handle a total of five special tiles, only available to those players who have stored a certain minimum amount of energy. Now it becomes even more critical to keep a close eye on those small, somewhat difficult to handle, green energy markers, as the new tiles award many points and special abilities. For example, another storage space for collected tiles, which is desirable because as experts you start with only four of them.

Accelerating and braking

The smartest modification concerns moves ending on a port. In their next turn players may fly back entering the island from any coastal space – provided they take the new wind direction into account. This allows you to choose from a total of nine columns for your return. With the corresponding acceleration or braking maneuvers, almost any destination can be reached. This is when DIE INSELN IM NEBEL becomes real fun.

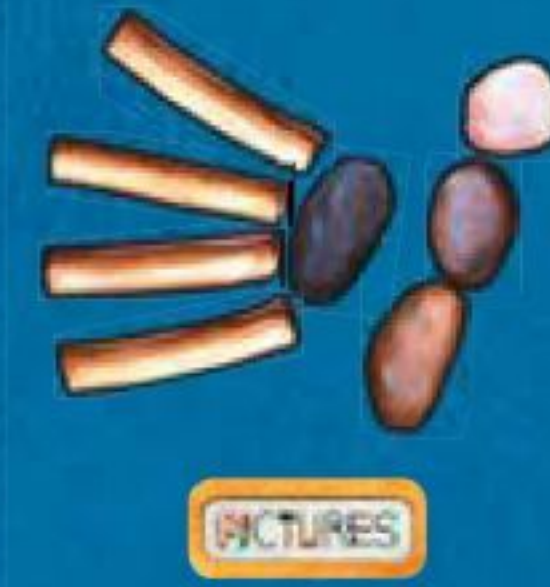
Games can turn quite passionate affairs, with their own little ups and downs. On the one hand, you are quietly tinkering to expand your island even further. On the other hand, you cast hectic glances at your neighbors, to spot if they are already closing the bag before you can do your thing. While you are certain to cash in soon on the expansions and collected



Title: Die Inseln im Nebel
Publisher: Schmidt
Designer: Volker Schächtele
Artist: Michael Menzel
Players: 2-4
Age: about 10+ years
Duration: about 45-60 minutes
Price: about 32 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Stefan Ducksch	7
Christwart Conrad*	6
Wieland Herold	7
Gerald Rüscher**	7

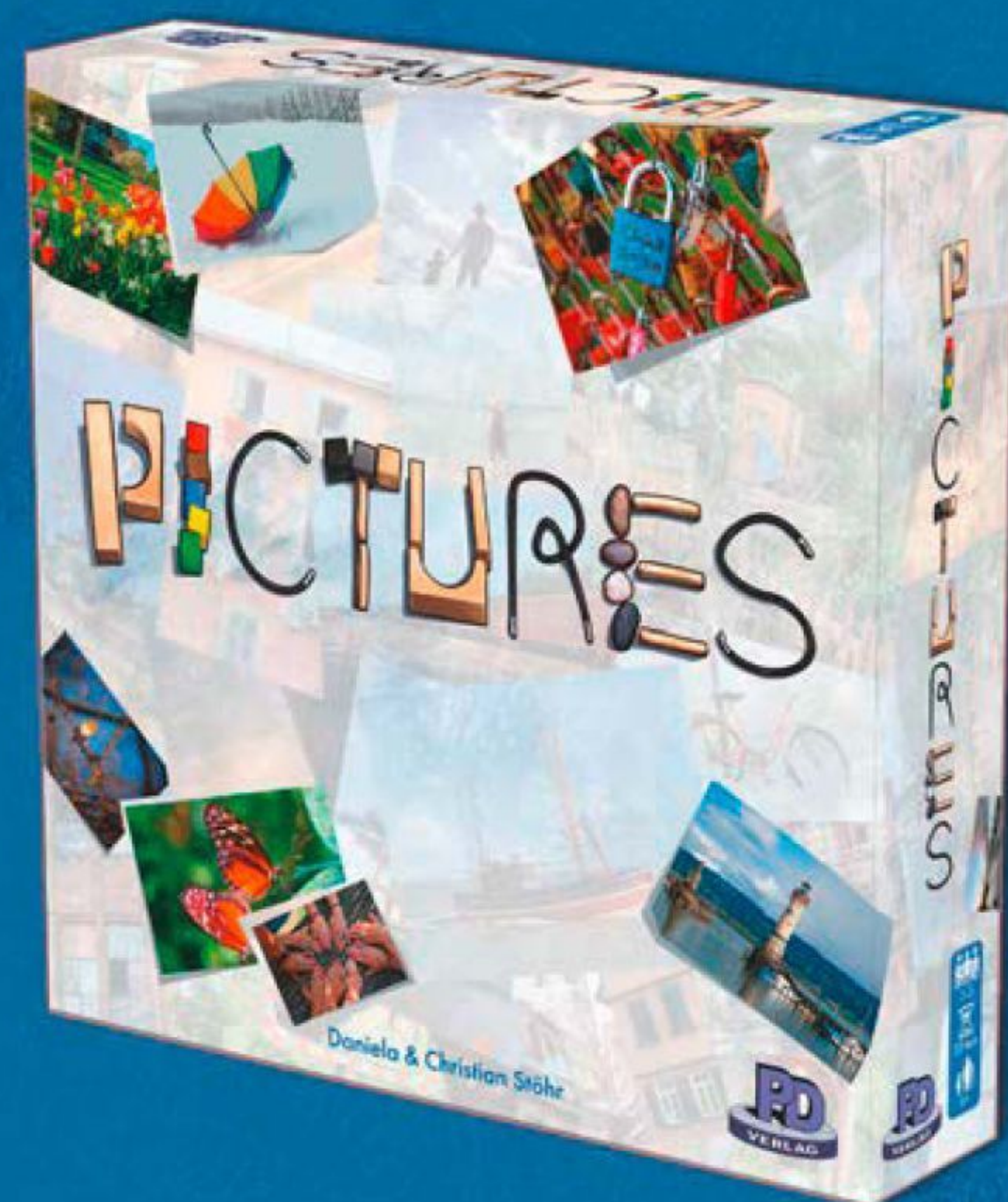
* Rating applies to the base game.
** Fully expanded with all modules.



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It Just Keeps on Rolling...

The fear of missing out turns all of us into hunters. We'd rather line up an hour earlier at the convention before all tables fill up. We'd rather pre-order the newest release before it's sold out. We'd rather back a game than see it not released at all. Only years of experience – and here we mean many years – lead to more serenity. As it turns out, outstanding things come back again and again. And as it also turns out, there isn't that much that is outstanding.

Among the many record-breaking games from Wolfgang Kramer, TOP RACE holds the record for the most published game versions. In the U.S., DAYTONA 500 is the most widely known name of all eight that the game has been published under between 1974 and today. Currently in its twelfth version it is called DOWNFORCE.

Three lucky circumstances worked in favor for the new release: Firstly, and luckily, a new publisher appeared with Restoration

Games that focuses on refreshing and bringing games from past decades to the market. Secondly, and also luckily, the Chief Restoration Officer of the company, author Rob Daviau, who is mainly known for his legacy games, was very fond of the old racing game DAYTONA 500 by Milton Bradley.

Years ago he played it with his kids and remembered it well. And the third lucky factor was the game itself. It is one that stands out and consequently one that has returned.

Purposeful wastage

DOWNFORCE is a card driven car race. In the beginning, all the cards are dealt out. Usually the cards show several different colors. On your turn you have to move all depicted vehicles according to the stated value. Sometimes this creates more pain than joy – who likes helping their opponents? But this is what keeps it especially interesting: You are always involved, even if it is not your turn. You can always hope

to benefit from your opponent's move.

Because everyone moves everyone forward, DOWNFORCE, on the one hand, feels constructive and positive. On the other hand, because as humans we generally tend to not to be too happy with other's successes, DOWNFORCE also includes some extremely destructive aspects – which add to the fun of the game just as much. The race track narrows in a few spots. Vehicles are not allowed to pass blocked spaces; therefore they can't always get through and some of their movement powers are wasted. Or all of their movement, sorry. Nothing feels better than the gloating joy when you figure out a move that advances your own vehicle quickly while it puts the depicted

AGGRESSIVE

If you play a card with your car at the top of the card, you may move that car 1 additional space.

Does not apply to wilds or cards with only one color on it.

opponent's car into the middle of a traffic jam. In the course of the race, DOWNFORCE has a lot more depth than what you might expect due to its simple structure.

The small degree of abstraction also draws younger players into the action; everyone is familiar with the basic idea of a race. Intuitively, you know what to do in DOWNFORCE. The scores and the consequences of each move are easy to follow on the board. DOWNFORCE works as a fun,

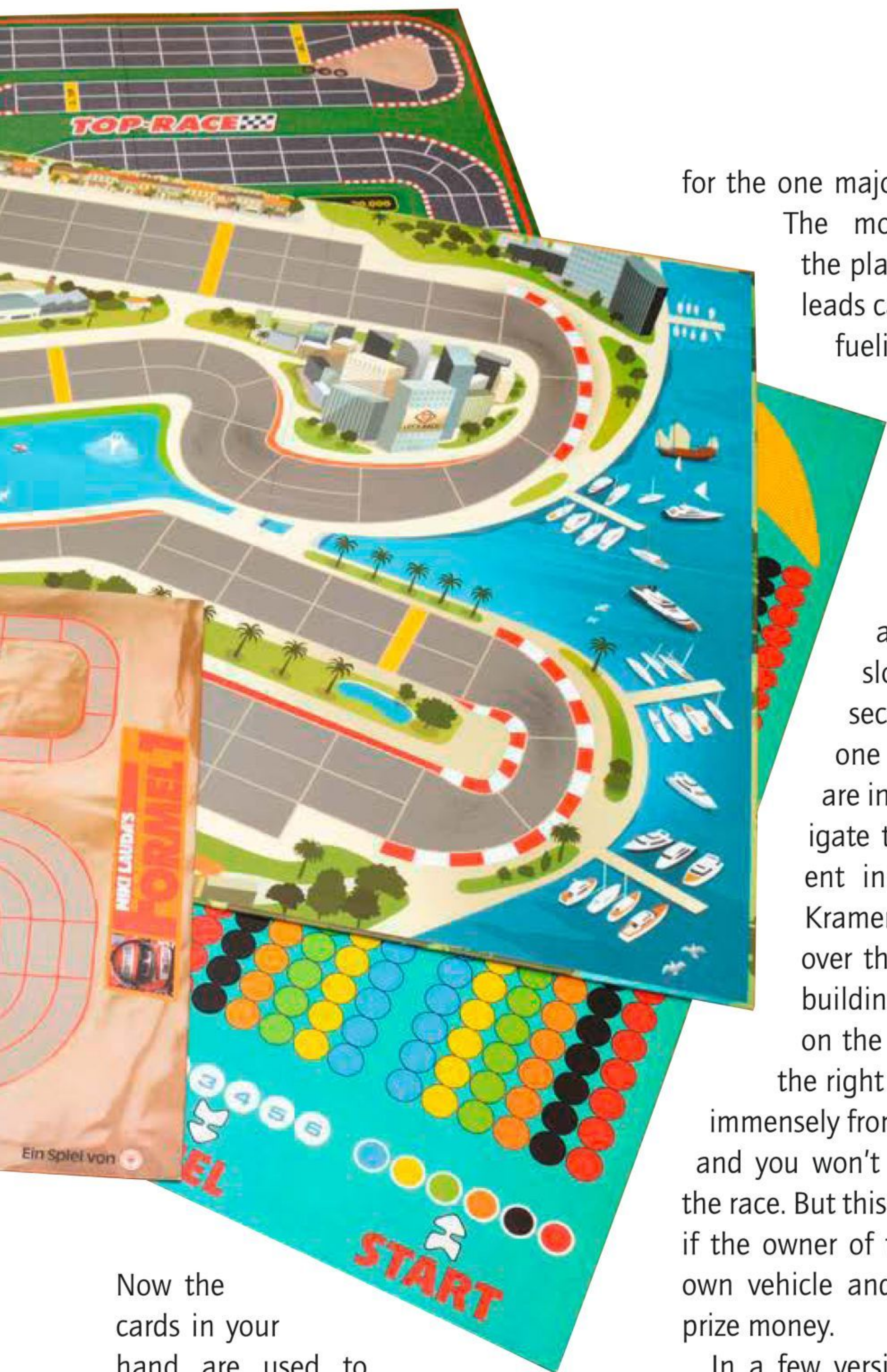
as well as, a tactical game and is a prime example for how you can constantly improve games. And not only can, but must, in order to continue to meet the changing tastes of time.

The narrowing of the race track did not exist in the original game TEMPO. Betting on the racing results let you earn a bonus along with the extra bonus points you get for crossing the finish line first. Wolfgang Kramer only added these to later versions of the game. "Today games are more complex than in the past," he says. "DOWNFORCE in its current form probably would have had fewer fans in 1974."

More than 40 years later, Rob Daviau was faced with the task to reinvent DOWNFORCE once more. "We tried to take the best from each version," he says. "We want DOWNFORCE to work equally well with two to six players, be accessible and short." A new addition is the ability to bid on a random pairing of a race car and driver, which all bring different skills to the table.

The fact that some drivers are more sought-after than others is not really problematic in itself. Respectively, higher or lower bids can balance this out. But in DOWNFORCE the stacks of money bills of former versions were removed and therefore some variety in the bidding was lost.





Now the cards in your hand are used to do the bidding. The value in the color of the offered car is the currency, which means nobody can bid higher than six and no-one will have the full selection of values one to six all at the same time. Therefore the auction becomes more random.

Additionally, the makers have not been able to find a decent solution

for the one major problem of the game: The movement system favors the player in the lead. Whoever leads can be certain that points fueling their car don't go to waste. The frontrunner moves forward if he is depicted on the played card. If you are in second place or further behind, you are always at risk to get slowed down in the narrow sections. The further behind one falls, the more obstacles are in the way. In order to mitigate the discrimination inherent in the system, Wolfgang Kramer found various solutions over the course of time. A first building block is the bidding on the race results. If you have the right instinct, you can benefit immensely from someone else's success and you won't have to necessarily win the race. But this would benefit only little, if the owner of the car also bets on his own vehicle and wins the bet and the prize money.

In a few versions of the game, cards with special abilities also mix up the action. They allow cars that have fallen behind to take a giant leap forward, or to push stranded vehicles up front to the side of the road. Therefore the car in the lead can never be too sure of their position. But, as a follower, you must first own one of these rare cards in order to use it to your benefit. The consequences can turn the course of a race on its head. For that reason, Daviau removed the cards. "They brought too many surprises," he says and recommends players work together to prevent a start to finish victory of the car in the lead.

Wolfgang Kramer, who okayed all the changes in DOWNFORCE agreed with Daviau's decision. "The cards were very dominant and often decided the outcome of the whole game," he shares from experience. "I can understand why they were removed. I like playing with them – but enjoy the game just as much without them." First and foremost, Kramer is excited that one of his games is back in the market. "Best would be if all of them would be available," he laughs.

DOWNFORCE™					
AUCTION PRICE	CAR	BET 1	BET 2	BET 3	
	BLACK				
	BLUE				
	GREEN				
	ORANGE				
	RED				
	YELLOW				
BETTING PAYOUTS		1st	\$9 M	\$6 M	\$3 M
		2nd	6 M	4 M	2 M
		3rd	3 M	2 M	1 M
RACING PAYOUTS					
1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
\$12 M	9 M	6 M	4 M	2 M	0 M
RACING TOTAL		+	BETTING TOTAL		-
			AUCTION TOTAL		=
					M
					TOTAL WINNINGS

UNPREDICTABLE

If you play a card with a wild on it, you may use that wild for a color that is already on the card.

DETERMINED

On any player's turn, if your car moved into only rectangular spaces, you may move it 2 additional spaces.

But that is merely a nice wish, because not all oldies are undisputedly up to date. DOWNFORCE is a very special game for Kramer. TEMPO, the pre-predecessor was Kramer's debut work. It was published in 1974 by Ass after Ravensburger rejected it based on the similarities to JOCKEY. But even though JOCKEY is almost forgotten today, Kramer's NIKI LAUDA'S FORMEL 1 keeps on racing.

The most beautiful edition so far

From the cover to the boards to the pieces, DOWNFORCE is the most beautiful edition so far. And although the various TOP RACE variants have already reached a sales volume of almost 300,000 units worldwide, DOWNFORCE could have a chance in the market. Many that are new to the hobby wouldn't even know about this evergreen. And through the distribution of Iello the game is available in some parts of Europe for the very first time. Restoration Games still has plans for DOWNFORCE. The first expansion, DANGER CIRCUIT, that adds two additional race tracks to the two of the base game was already released. A second expansion with the name of WILD RIDE is planned for 2020.

Udo Bartsch/dm

CUNNING

You always move your cars, even on other people's turns.



A World Made of Grid Squares

The game based on the movie. There are few subtitles that let a connoisseur's truffle nose wrinkle in automatic reflex. This typically only happens with the message: The game based on the computer game. How is that supposed to work? How are you supposed to confine a world without end to a box? With CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME and MINECRAFT - BUILDERS & BIOMES now two digital mega successes were translated onto a board. And the noses immediately create their first gentle wrinkles.

Wasteland, endless widths. The year is 2015, the development of one's own cities began. In only 24 hours, 250,000 people got sucked into *Cities: Skylines* to discover the unofficial *Sim City* and the official *Cities in Motion* successor, to bring new life and civilization into the uninhabited wasteland. Cities never before seen by mankind were built.

Creating win-win scenarios

In the Kosmos adaption, the wasteland finally becomes manageable with four quadrants of potential building land. The players, as the city fathers, direct the basic supply of electricity, water and garbage collection for our small community all financed by tax money. They also create the infrastructure for police, fire brigade, education and health services, as well as, public transport, which are all so essential for our happiness. This costs.

And money is, very realistically by the way, tight. So, business and industry is needed to help accumulating the necessary small change through sales and business taxes. Residential areas must be designated so that companies can find enough workers.

Only a thriving city is a good city, only continuous growth generates rewards, at least when win-win scenarios are created.

If the head of a company wants to build their factory right next to an elementary school, he shall get his way. Otherwise, he might escape into shady equity deals and not pay taxes at all. As co-operatively acting city council, players have only one thing in mind: full coffers. Oh yes, and the actual goal, the currency of the heart: content citizens.

These are the kind of deals that CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME is all about:

whoever has the say as the active builder, picks one of the cards in their hand and adds the depicted building as a puzzle piece to the city, of course always voted on with the colleagues in a pleasant democratic discourse. Regarding the utility and service units, the building plan dictates precisely what's next. With residential, commercial and industrial areas, everyone is free to choose whatever they want. There is a lot of variety, creativity has been given free reign in regards to use of various shapes. Residential areas are mostly smaller and therefore easier to build, industrial areas on the other hand take up a lot of space.

After a building is constructed, your tiles are refilled from the freely chosen one of the three stacks. Stack 1 is comprised of buildings that don't have too drastic of an effect on the city and which bonuses are easier to attain. The third stack contains the opposite: strong





effects, but also more profits. Additionally, more and more unique buildings start to appear that provide great and permanent benefits or policies that make the city more livable. And then there are the news cards,

End of a Milestone

For each step < 0: -1

Game with role cards: follow landscape gardener, mayor, administrator card

Transfer happiness value to skyline for overall happiness

For each step > 0 or < 0: -1

Pay development costs and turn over new game board piece

Exchange construction cards: -1 each

If News card is drawn → straight into the box

Current News card and unused policy cards → into the box.

which add the extra something. They introduce penalties that impose further important restrictions on the otherwise quite free puzzling. It's best to join the action right away with all modules.

Whoever doesn't want or isn't able to build, trades a card and starts a new discard pile that is open to everyone. Alternatively, you can trigger an interim scoring which ushers



in a new building phase. This is only an option after at least one building project has been realized in each city district. Towards the end you even need two completed projects for these interim scores. What counts almost exclusively in the end is the happiness of the population, which declines if the city cannot provide for itself sufficiently. And in the end also environmental and traffic pollution as well as the crime rate effect our mood. The city fathers also must make sure they don't run out of money. If the ratio between population and labour demand is unbalanced, it becomes expensive. And they must make sure there are enough funds to develop new areas.

The strategy for *CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME* is pretty obvious: First perfect the infrastructure in order to be able to satisfy all wishes. For example, the water supply must always be guaranteed, and the criminal scum must be kept off the streets, which only enough police presence can achieve. That makes sense so far. Only often there is not enough money for the investments. Another challenge is that the available cards don't always fit together seamlessly so it's impossible to use all of them to their advantage. It is important to collect as many bonuses as possible, not only to avoid being restricted in your card placement options, but also to avoid bankruptcy, which would end the game immediately. It is also bad if the mood among the inhabitants is lousy.

More than just winning

The experience of the game is less focused on the old co-op question: Who won – us or the mechanism? It is rather a matter of one's own ambition, not only to create a prestigious city, but to create a metropolis. Merely winning isn't enough, it has to be as high a score as possible, which is something to get used to at first. Especially solo players are familiar with this trick, an adaptation of the sandbox system. Anyone who loves *Cities: Skylines* will recog-

CITIES: NEWS

2219

CITIZENS ARE SICK

Whenever rises:

-1

Immediately valid. Will be replaced by another News card or discarded at the end of the milestone.

COMMERCIAL ZONE

-1 -1 +1

↓

: +4

INCINERATION PLANT

-5 +5

CITIES: NEWS

3218

LAX OVERSIGHT

Whenever is built:

+1

Immediately valid. Will be replaced by another News card or discarded at the end of the milestone.

BUS STATION

-5 -4

POLICIES

Ban on soft drinks

-3 +1 per

Cannot be exchanged. Discard at end of a milestone.

SPEECHWRITER

If you end a and there are at least three tiles in each :

+2

INDUSTRIAL ZONE

-2 +1 +1

↓

: +7

RESIDENTIAL ZONE

-1 +1

↓

< 0: +2

UNIQUE BUILDING

OPERA HOUSE

Immediately after construction:

+1 for each in this

MAYOR

If you end a and = 0:

+3

POLICE STATION

-1 -2

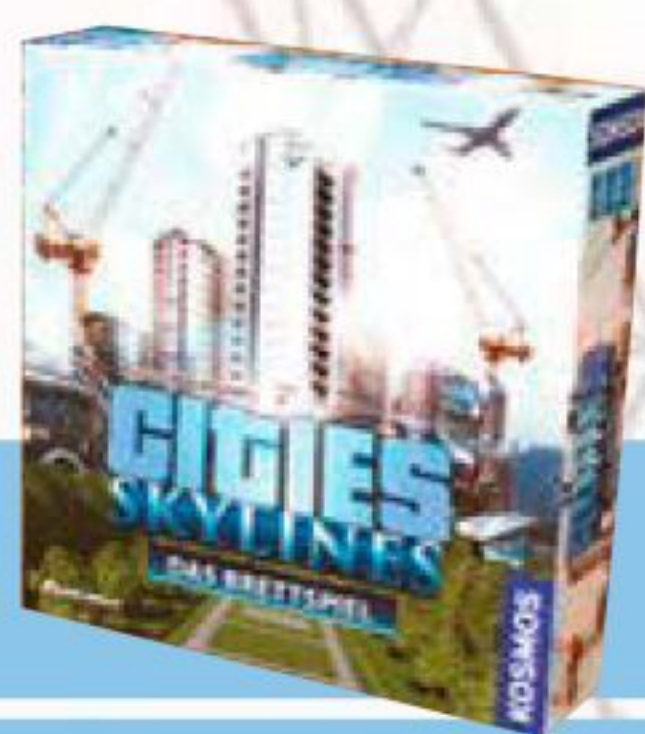


nize many familiar aspects on the board: Living is green, business blue and industry yellow. They will know about the unsightly effects of urban development like sooty air and congested streets. In order to avoid these, the city planners discuss soberly how to master the downsides of their neoliberal aspirations. Since the threat is rather latent and a decision rarely has existential consequences, the whole thing lacks excitement. CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME does not have the nerve wracking or scary effect of games like PANDEMIC or LEGENDS OF ANDOR.

The collective puzzle solving feels more like a relaxed walk on a Sunday than an emotional dance on the volcano, keeping with the spirit of the Hygge era. This is why it also works particularly well with two players or solo, the way puzzles are done most of the time.

It even comes close to virtual urban planning, but you have to like this particular kind of unexcitement.

Andreas Becker/dm



Title: **Cities Skylines - The Board Game**
Publisher: **Kosmos**
Designer: **Rustan Håkansson**
Players: **1-4**
Age: **about 10+ years**
Duration: **about 40-75 minutes**
Price: **about 35 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Andreas Becker	6
Christwart Conrad	5
L. U. Dikus*	7
Stefan Ducksch	7
Wieland Herold	6
KMW.	6
Gerald Rüscher	6
Harald Schrapers**	5

* The construction of a so-called model city with between 31 to 40 points is achievable with all scenarios. For a higher score, however, divine intervention seems necessary.

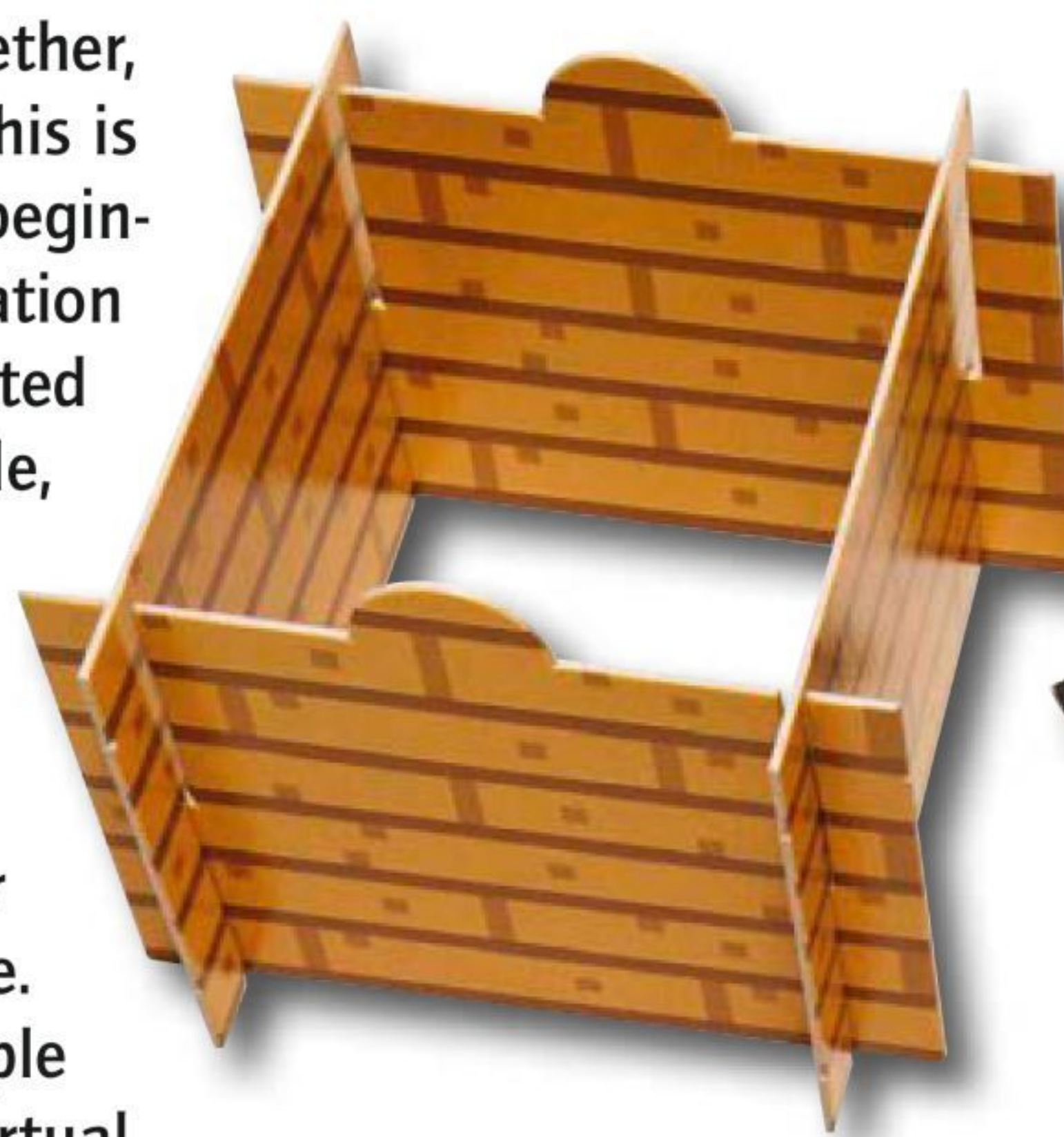
** CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME feels like a solo game, that in spite of its neat mechanism aimlessly bobs around. The scoring is no incentive here, and games like Just One manage to be fun even when played disregarding any form of victory points.

REVIEW

Minecraft - Builders & Biomes

A world Made of Pixels

Overworld and Nether, infinite expanses. This is the year 2009, the beginning of the exploration of a coarsely pixelated world. Meanwhile, more than 176 million copies of *Minecraft* have been sold, more than of any other game worldwide. Millions of people have set out into virtual reality, to explore new lands, to build tools and gadgets, and to fight monsters. Buildings were created that no one has seen before.

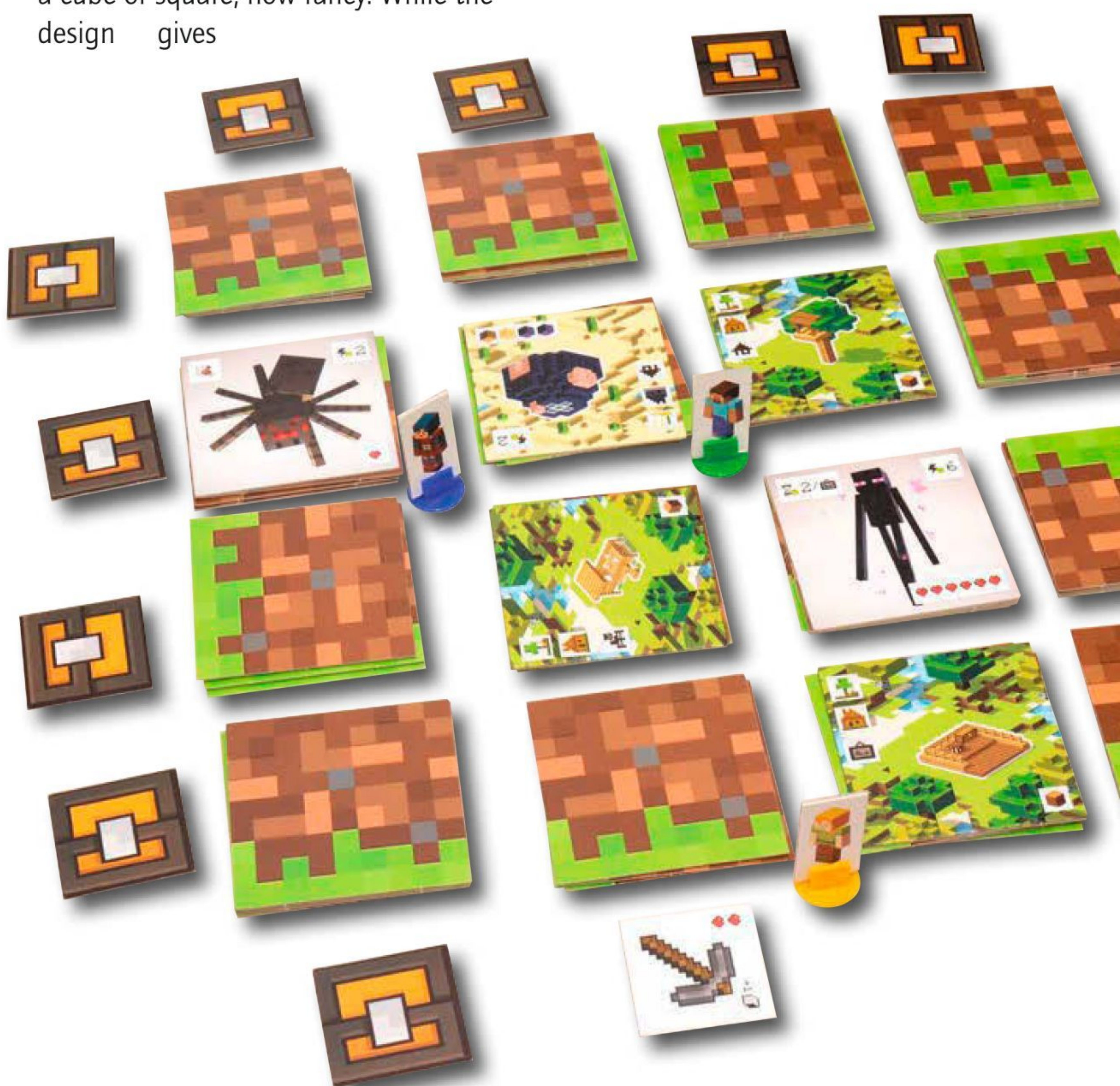


Roaming around and discovering, mining blocks of wood, sand or obsidian, building houses with them, getting armed and fighting monsters – much from the digital *Minecraft* world can also be found on the board. But while city planners in CITIES SKYLINES mainly discover the flow of the digital in the analog, the recognition in MINECRAFT - BUILDERS & BIOMES is limited to visual aspects. The world as a cube or square, how fancy. While the design gives

some gamers eye tinnitus, others find the consistent pixel-look magnificent.

More conventional on the board

Well, the differences quickly become noticeable, for example in mining and employing the building material blocks. While it is a core element in the digital game to manufacture tools, items, weapons or armor with them –



first mining, then crafting –, things are more conventional on the board: The raw materials are first collected from some kind of quarry and then used for house construction. The quarry, an impressive cuboid of material, is, however, a fine tactical element and forms the gameplay core, as the miners and crafters themselves have the power to trigger a scoring. This happens whenever a complete layer of cubes has been removed. Only then does the cash register ring, namely for the most valuable area of identical landscapes; later on there are experience points to be gained for areas with houses from the same building material or identical building types. Which raises a question: Should the skin (there are no meeples in the pixel world) simply grind down the mountain of building materials? Or push for a scoring?

Sometimes these scorings happen slowly and gradually, but mostly in relatively close intervals after a calm build-up phase, depending on the intention to exploit the raw material deposits. Note: These scorings do not exist in the digital game, neither in creative nor in survival mode, and are concessions to analog gaming.

However, building and scoring are only half the battle, for there is also monster fighting. It comes with two advantages: Firstly, the witches, skeletons, etc. earn valuable points; secondly, they trigger additional scorings at the end of the game. If a player has specialized, say, in animal enclosures and forests and was able to take out the respective creeper or enderman, they will receive experience points for both again. This is not insignificant in the fight for the MINECRAFT crown.

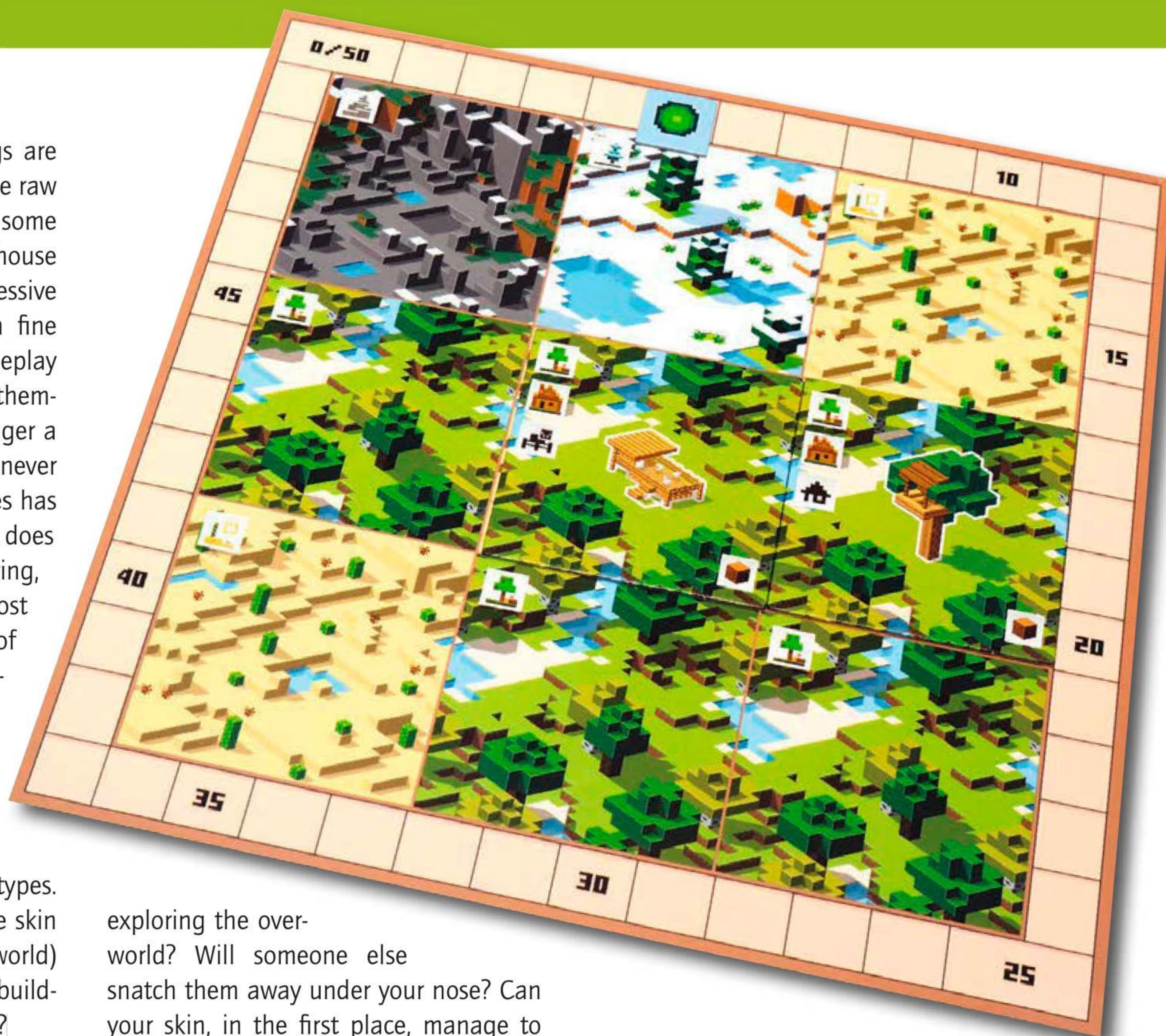
However, any monster strategy is also luck-dependent. Do these guys pop up where you are just

exploring the over-world? Will someone else snatch them away under your nose? Can your skin, in the first place, manage to defeat them? Even skins with a nice deck of weapons sometimes go away empty-handed, as their private arsenal is shuffled before the fight, with only three tiles to be drawn. If these show enough hearts, everything is fine. But poisonous potatoes will not impress the monster in the least. If your fighting power is too low, you have just wasted an action, with no other disadvantages. But if you draw slower than your shadow too many times and waste too many actions on unsuccessful monster fights, you are gonna pay for it.

Not a spectacular, but a well-made blend

The MINECRAFT - BUILDERS & BIOMES instrument mix is nice. It will delight the heart of planners to pave their landscape with buildings. And it will delight the heart of gamblers to scuffle with monsters. It is easy to settle down comfortably in the cardboard MINECRAFT, in the best sense of the word – or it might all turn into a wily optimization game where players begrudge each other even the tiniest bit of obsidian. This is when gameplay feels much more like a conventional board game than a perceptive analog adaptation of a digital one. This mix might not be spectacular, but it is, without doubt, very appealing.

Andreas Becker/cs



Title: **Minecraft - Builders & Biomes**
 Publisher: **Ravensburger**
 Artist: **Ulrich Blum**
 Players: **2–4**
 Age: **about 10+ years**
 Duration: **about 30–60 minutes**
 Price: **about 40 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Andreas Becker	6
Udo Bartsch	6
Christwart Conrad	7
Matthias Hardel*	6
Wieland Herold	7
Harald Schrapers**	7

* Surprisingly, the game has a certain charm and with a more grown-up theme and a less hazardous design, I would be happy to play it more often. As far as its terrific ratio of effort and effect is concerned, the stacking aid for the blocks is almost a stroke of genius, especially since it is basically indispensable.

** Astonishingly good game that turns the video game blocks into a haptic experience. This way even young Minecraft lovers who are not yet into board gaming gain a quick access; they already know the proper names of the monsters and will get the first tactical subtleties in the second game.

Cross-Promotion Appreciated

So, what do computer gamers do when they are not sitting in front of their screens? Well, they play. With friends. At a table. Totally analog. Minimum once a month. At least according to a survey that the Swedish software manufacturer Paradox Interactive conducted among its customers. The board-gamification of the digital world has begun.

It is not an entirely new phenomenon. *Sid Meiers's Civilization*, *World of Warcraft*, *Bioshock Infinite* – seen from this perspective, analogization is an old hat. However, up to now mainly titles that were aimed at a limited clientele, namely hardcore fans, found their way from the screen to the table. The new thing about the current trend is something quite different: the attempt to appeal to the mass market, hence *CITIES SKYLINES - THE BOARD GAME* (Kosmos), hence *MINECRAFT - BUILDERS & BIOMES* (Ravensburger).

Paradox with own booth at Essen

The fact that board-gamification can be an interesting market segment became pretty apparent at the last

Essen fair. Paradox was present with their own booth. "We know that 60 percent of our customers also bring board games to the table, at least once a month. We are assuming that this figure is now even higher because of the growth figures in the analog games market," says Mats Karlöf, who is in charge of opening up new business fields for Paradox.

The Swedish company sees the analog game as an opportunity for customer retention. This way, fans of Paradox products can spend even more time with them, now also offline. "It increases the

value of our brands," explains Karlöf. In addition, the analog game offers another opportunity: Gamers might use it to introduce *Cities: Skylines* to their friends who previously had no affinity to the computer game – and get them interested in it. "We hope that they will then also visit our digital worlds," as Karlöf explains the strategy. Normally, the com-



Mats Karlöf



pany would invest money in advertising. In the best case scenario, this advertising could now finance itself – or even open up a new business segment.

I Free choice for Håkansson

Paradox turned to Rustan Håkansson, probably the best-known board game developer in Sweden, to push the topic. "They asked me if I felt like creating one of their brands. That was when I chose

the comparatively minor rule that an intermediate scoring can only be triggered when a building has been erected in each district. Each group decides for itself whether population happiness can still be increased or whether the perfect point in time is reached for the next intermediate scoring.

Initially, Håkansson's design approach was far more conventional. He started off with a classic competitive game: May

the best score bag the most happiness points. Only last year he presented a version at PDX-Con, the Paradox in-house fan trade show. Response and feedback were good. But after another meeting with Kosmos, the analog partner in the project, it turned out that people there were not quite so convinced.

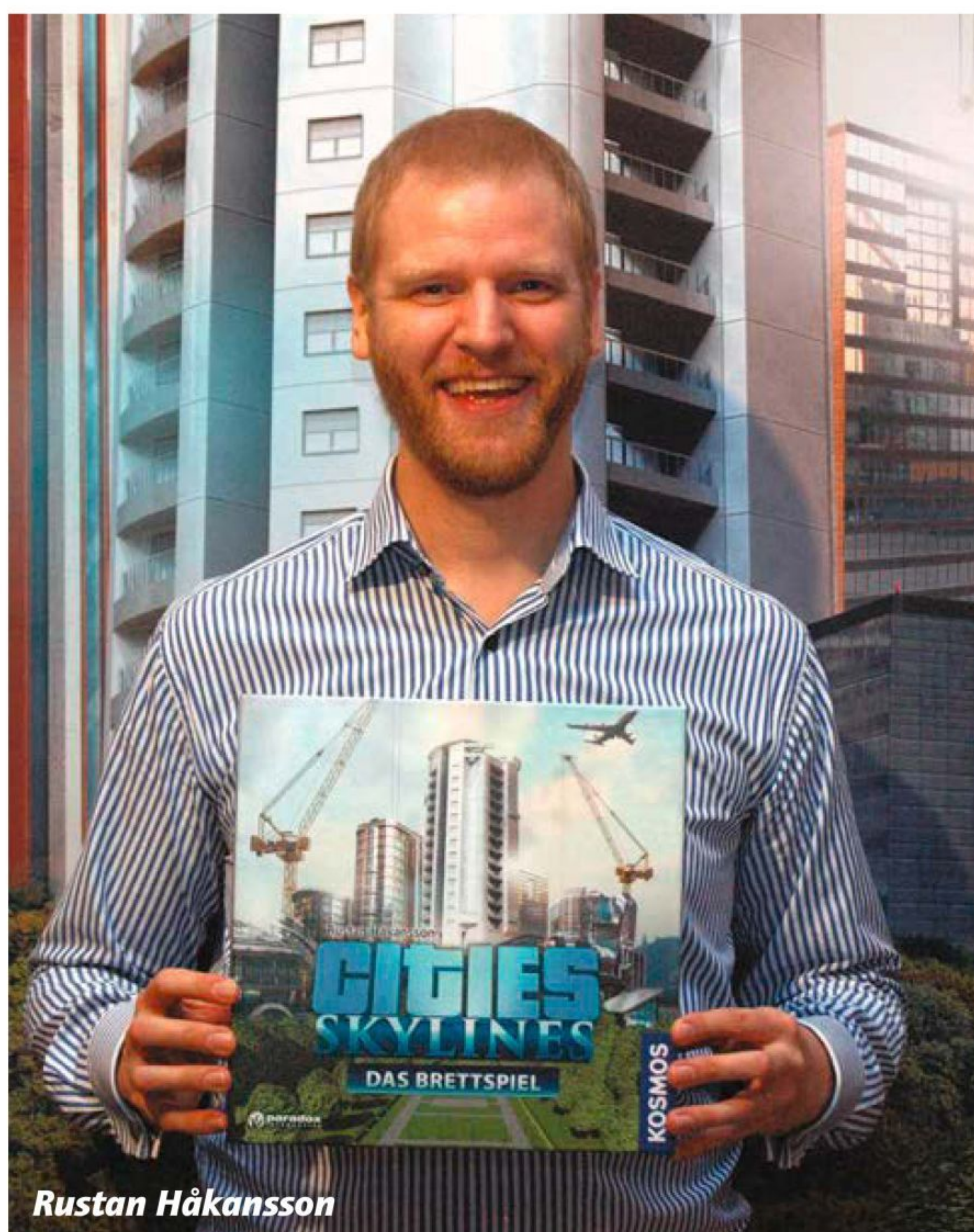
"They asked whether the game might not also work cooperatively," recalls the author. It was one of the hardest decisions he ever

had to make during a development process: After so much work, after so much dedication, was he supposed to throw everything overboard and start all over again? Today Rustan Håkansson claims it was the right decision as it meant a real breakthrough.

Ulrich Blum was not faced with the choice of what to put on the board. For him, it was all about how he could implement *Minecraft*. "Ravensburger had bought the license from Mojang. They then contacted several designers."

Blum was one of them. The only requirement was that the game should have something distinctively *Minecraft* about it. Ah, and it would have to be ready pretty soon.

"The request came in fall 2018. After I had submitted a draft, a playable ver-



Rustan Håkansson

Cities: Skylines" says Håkansson. Simply because he is into the game himself. But then he was confronted with a mountain of things he had to process into something that could be managed on a board. Starting with housekeeping, which the computer normally does entirely in the background, down to the most minute detail. "How was I supposed to transfer that?" After all, it should not be too free and easy, or it "would no longer be a game." Add to that the requirement that the game should be easy to learn with a downtime kept within narrow limits.

Another problem: Urban development on the screen works like a sandbox system, with each player setting his or her own goals. Håkansson wanted to capture this character. So he granted players a lot of freedom, by specifying

Project Mars

Now with
Moving Forward
expansion

Who will get there first?

2 to 4 players
60 minutes
Age 14+

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 Point 'n Click
design

sion was to be available by the end of January, for the Nuremberg trade fair." Mid-February he received confirmation. After that, pretty much everything in Blum's life turned into MINECRAFT, until the beginning of June. "I was working very closely with the publishers. And with Mojang, who were really involved in the design process. They tested our prototypes a lot. And they are very happy with the result."

I Mass market targeted

Ulrich Blum was also faced with an almost impossible task: How can an open world scenario be integrated into a box? "It was obvious that we could not even begin to reproduce everything that could be done on the computer." But it was already a given that resources had to be included, and mining was also imperative. But free building, like in creative mode? Not translatable. The space for discovery was also finite – and limited to the overworld. Still, the monsters had to be included. After all, there should be something to rediscover for the connoisseurs.

"Ravensburger also wanted a product that would appeal to the mass market. On the other hand, the *Minecraft* players should not consider it a stupid game," explains Blum. Because of the theme, everything should be so easily acces-

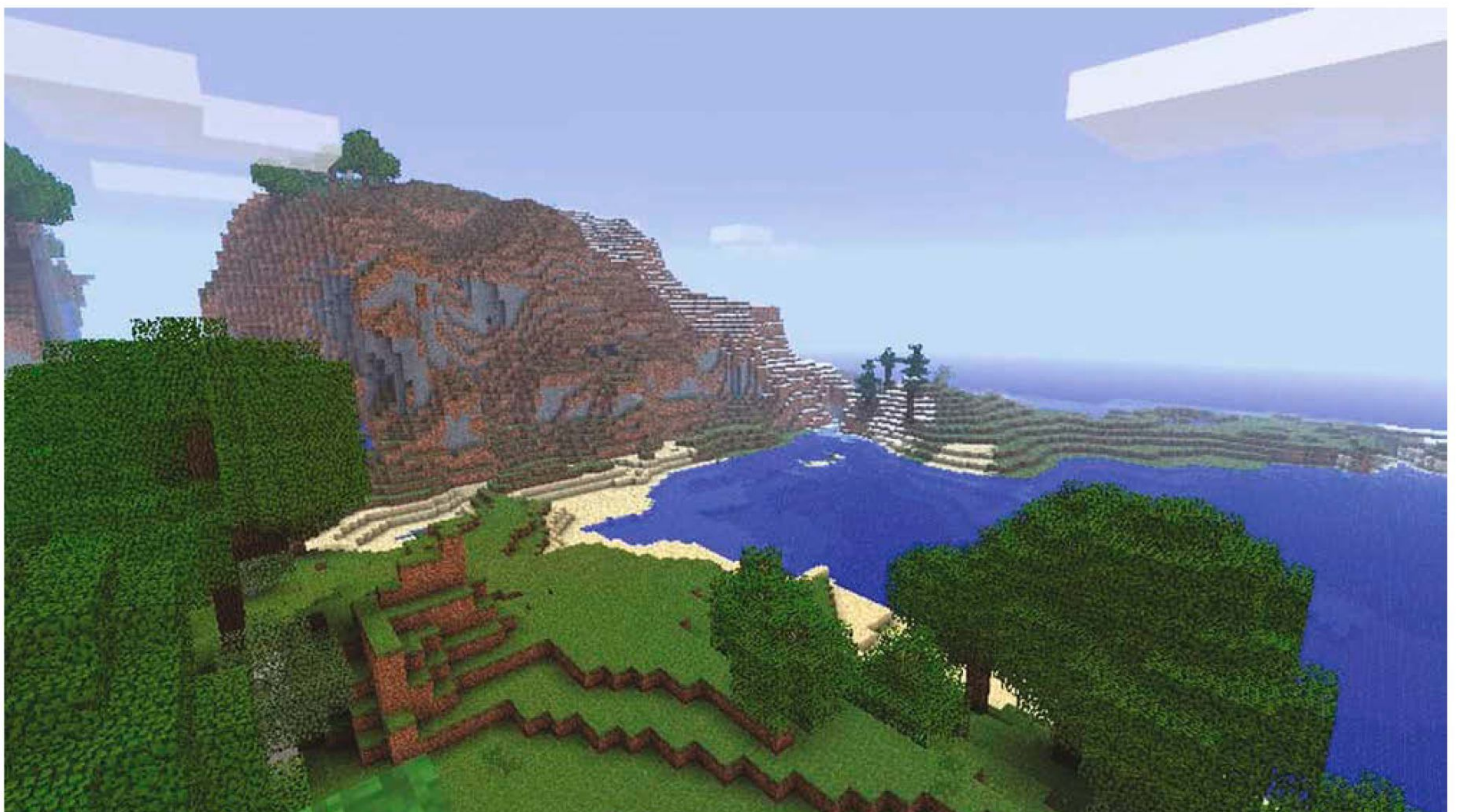


Ulrich Blum

sible that it could be a gateway game, a door opener into the world of analog gaming. "We have managed to achieve that through a lot of streamlining." He says we, because during the whole design process he worked intensively with Ravensburger editor Daniel Greiner, a vivid Minecraft fan and great expert on the subject.

He states that the reactions to MINECRAFT - BUILDERS & BIOMES were as hoped: Younger people find it exciting to explore Minecraft in a box. Older players like the resource pad and that they can go tactical with the scores. And Mojang likes it because it adds another dimension to the way *Minecraft* can be played.

Andreas Becker/cs





WHICH OF YOU IS THE REAL ROBIN?

Robin of Locksley is a game for 2 players where the players move their pieces around a 5x5 grid to collect loot. The more loot they collect, the faster they can move around the race track on the edge of the board.

The player who can collect the right tiles can keep moving on the track while their opponent has to wait. The first one to complete two laps around the track will be crowned the winner!

Sounds easy? Do not be fooled! Your opponent can try to stop you by taking the tiles you need. With a variable game structure and many possible board layouts, Robin of Locksley will challenge you again and again!



Beautiful and Ugly Finds

Some clubs are more select than others. The more exclusive they are, the more their vetting process is a deterrent. Secret schoolyard gangs, for example, might have children swallow earthworms and gag just to be accepted as a member. Or, one could imagine that being admitted to the club for highly-gifted individuals would require candidates to memorize the tome "20,000 Matchstick Puzzles from Around the World", whereas a tennis club would simply require members to pay a lot of money – and wear white socks – to be admitted. The Royal Monstrological Society is a particularly exclusive club. Those who want to join must capture and present the most fearsome creatures, and only one of the competitors will be admitted.

Freakish creatures are everywhere: in stuffy sports bars, in the bargain section of a furniture discount store, in the audience of certain comedy shows, and on some games magazine's editorial team. Quickly spread out the net and... oh no, you missed! You will also find these creatures in CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS, which takes place in a fantasy world far away from bars, comedy shows, and games magazine. For these special encounters you have to travel into forests, caves, or dreamlands. In fact, there is a total of six different regions where the monsters are hiding out.

Starting off in the forest, I didn't know what the other players were up to. Each player held a hand of eight cards, mostly a colorful mixture of land cards, monsters and other things. I chose one card and give the rest to my neighbor. This drafting thins out the thicket and I slowly discover what is hidden in my forest. In games of two or three

players, this knowledge is more valuable than when there are four or five monster hunters, because more of the cards that are passed around come back to you. So, I could deliberately wait until the next go-round to collect the creature I was interested in. I could afford to do so because I realized that the competition couldn't capture that monster.

I No sign of life

If you want to bag a monster, you need land cards. For example, I only need one cave land card for the Wurm to cower at my feet. However, for the mighty – and much more valuable – Leviathan, I'll need four depths points. So, I collect land cards, but there is a caveat here. I can only play a higher-valued land card if I have already played the ones that come before it for the same land. So, if the higher-point land card arrives before the one that precedes it, I'm in a bind. Fortunately, every hunter has a camp where he can hold as many cards as he wants for later use. But this storage costs money and money is scarce, so you can quickly fall into the debt trap. Because you have lots of storage space, it's tempting to optimistically park creatures there while you wait for the corresponding land cards to grow the regions where you're going to catch the creatures. You convince yourself that it's only temporary, but ambition drives you to hold on to the more valuable prey to keep it from the other hunters. But beware, if you spend too many of your 32 moves dreaming up schemes for the future, you won't be able to realize all your plans and will end up wasting cards and money.

In CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS, simple strategies also lead to success: play a land card, repeat again and again. If a suitable monster comes along, haul it in. It's actually quite simple. But because players don't like simple, the ingenious author has incorporated refinements. He has added other types of cards to be passed around such as staff cards, but hiring these people costs money and it's not sure that they'll be of help to you. The Darklands Expert, for example, will get you two coins for every monster caught in this tenebrous area. Unfortunately, foretelling which creatures will constitute your future card stacks is harder than predicting tourism travel numbers or pollen levels. So, it can happen that while one expert boosts your cash, the other just twiddles his thumbs. The smaller the round, the fewer cards are in circulation, and the more random the mix. Not only can experts turn out to be a bad investment, but they also take up space in the optimistically planned lands. So, instead of verdant land cards, you end up with





uninhabited dreariness where there's no sign of life.

You can't plan for what happens in CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS. But one thing is certain, something will happen: cards come, and cards go. Sometimes there are so many wonderful things in the deck that you want to hold on to every one of them. At other times, especially towards



the end of the round, all that goes around is just junk and more junk, and the stupid thing is, you have to take a card. And if you can't play it, you have to store it and you end up paying for something you never even wanted. But it's also like hunting for mushrooms. Sometimes it goes better than others, and those who've done it before are better off than the beginners. Experience teaches you to what extent you should think of yourselves first or try to hinder the competition instead; or how many Land cards you are going to need; or when the Cumulus Beetle in your hand is better than the Quetzalcoatl in the bush.

I Damned if you do, damned if you don't

How much risk should you take? Some monsters, particularly the more valuable ones, bite, are poisonous, or are blue-haired and need special cages. But you usually just hide from them for the same reason companies ignore fire safety regulations or hygiene regulations, or people avoid cancer screening: These things cost money. And with a bit of luck all will go well – for a while. It's no different in CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS. Taking a card with a cage costs you a turn so you can't generate any points. And you may never use that cage, because the empire hands out free cages if the dice roll is lucky. It's all too easy to rely on the free cages and hope that there'll be enough of them. But what if there aren't? Best not ask. Close your eyes and hope. And if there aren't enough? Well then, you're penalized. Darn! As with enterprise, first curse and then abandoned it.

But back to mushroom picking. Sometimes blind luck just works. And sometimes you're not sure whether the mushroom should go in the basket or not. Of the 206 cards, 21 are secret goals. In addition to the Monsters, which make up the lion's share of the cards in the deck, secret goals also get you points

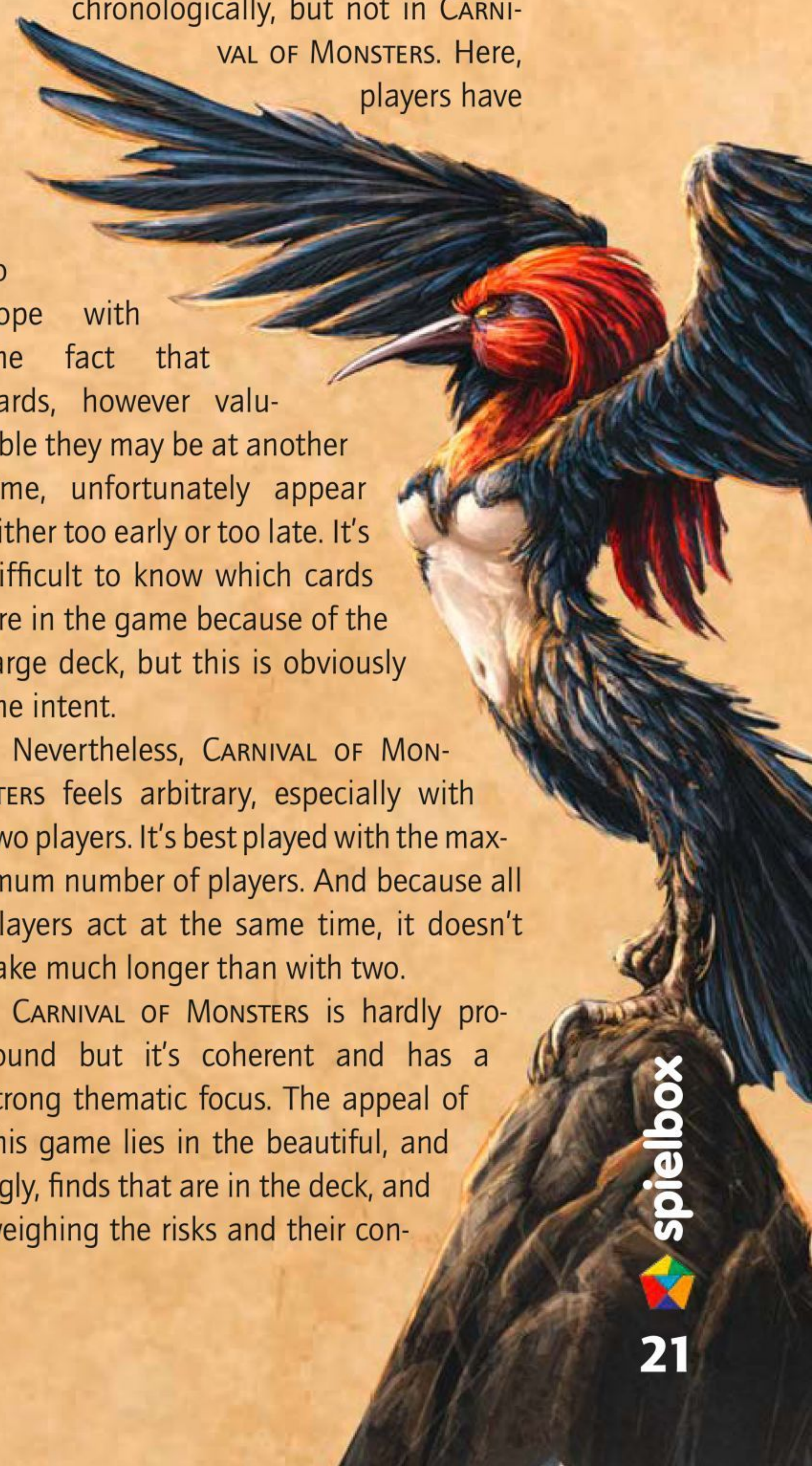
in the final count, provided you've fulfilled the conditions on the card. There are bonus points for experts, for certain land cards, and for certain monsters. You can even get bonus points for loan cards and bonus Vp points for bonus point cards. Sometimes a secret goal comes in handy, sometimes not so much, and you start to wonder. Secret goals spice up CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS by making you incorporate tactics. They add an extra dimension to the action. Monsters, on the other hand, are great and simple: their size determines the value which is printed on the card. The point value of a secret goal, however, is determined by the game play and the player's choices.

It clearly shows that the highly talented Richard Garfield was involved in designing CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS. The experience from MAGIC - THE GATHERING has taught players that land cards make it possible to play creatures. Garfield also used the idea of drafting cards of very different kinds in BUNNY KINGDOM, which is more complex and combines a game board with a distribution mechanism. In many drafting games, decks are arranged chronologically, but not in CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS. Here, players have

to cope with the fact that cards, however valuable they may be at another time, unfortunately appear either too early or too late. It's difficult to know which cards are in the game because of the large deck, but this is obviously the intent.

Nevertheless, CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS feels arbitrary, especially with two players. It's best played with the maximum number of players. And because all players act at the same time, it doesn't take much longer than with two.

CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS is hardly profound but it's coherent and has a strong thematic focus. The appeal of this game lies in the beautiful, and ugly, finds that are in the deck, and weighing the risks and their con-





sequences. Both the graphics and the game components are particularly striking. Amigo has given each monster its own illustrator, and the players an extra-large pile of cardboard coins.

I've got nothing against money, really – unless it's counterfeit money. Something just seems wrong when the coins look completely different from the money symbols on the cards. CARNIVAL OF MONSTERS comes with more than 500 monetary units, but most players still end up permanently indebted or chronically broke. So, what to do with the mountain of coins? If it doesn't work out with the admission in the Royal Monstrological Society, maybe a tennis club will take it.

Udo Bartsch/tw



Title: **Carnival of Monsters**
Publisher: **Amigo**
Designer: **Richard Garfield**
Artist: **Loic Billiau, Martin Hoffmann, Dennis Lohausen, Michael Menzel, Oliver Schlemmer, Claus Stephan, Franz Vohwinkel**
Players: **2–5 (for two: 2)**
Age: **about 12+ years**
Duration: **about 45 minutes**
Price: **about 35 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Udo Bartsch.....	6
L. U. Dikus*	7
Stefan Ducksch**	5
Wieland Herold.....	7
KMW.....	6
Harald Schrapers	6
Holger Traczinski***	7

* *Plays fast. Contrary to the publisher's statement, it's not a game for expert players. Card distribution and dice create quite a few moments of joy, which isn't a bad thing.*

** *Because the high number of cards is not divided into game phases, it often happens, especially with smaller groups, that some animal colors don't appear at all. It's annoying for those who have invested in Lands of that color.*

In addition, some secret goal cards are anything but self-explanatory, and the instructions don't help. Increased editorial care would have been more important to me here than x different artists.

*** *Fluid and beautifully designed card drafting, not quite as original as Bunny Kingdom by the same author.*

REVIEW

Res Arcana

Eight-card Wonder

If you're playing through the same deck over and over again, that's usually an indication that you're dealing with deckbuilders. RES ARCANA dispenses with the actual deck construction aspect, or more accurately, moves it to the beginning of the game. After that, cards are neither added nor are you concerned about culling your deck.

Even so, the feeling develops that you're playing a full-fledged deck builder, similar to the best examples of the genre.

The headline references only eight cards, but that doesn't quite tell the whole story. Players start the game with a mage in play and they will later acquire monuments. But these are never placed into the decks as they remain in front of the players in their own tableau. The same applies to the expensive and powerful location cards, which, just like the smaller magic item tiles, don't fit into the main deck due to their format anyway. The free items that give you a special ability have to be returned at the end of the round in exchange for another tile, anyway.

Death as a currency

Instead of a single currency, there are five, officially called essences. The practical storage container contains appropriately colored and shaped wooden tokens for the resources: death, calm, life, elan and the particularly valuable gold.

To play a card out of hand to your permanent tableau costs a number of indicated resources. Scarcity is the rule, and not just at the beginning of the game. If finding the resources seems problematic or you think a card in hand is not interesting at the moment, you can discard it to get one gold or any two other resources. As the game goes on, if you can get cards that complement each other in front of you, then



your resource production will run – hopefully! – like a well-oiled machine.

Played cards are activated (tapped) once each round. This happens in turn order and zips right along with two players. But you realize RES ARCANA can be stretched a little, and with three or even four players, you have to wait longer until it's your turn again.

If you are the first player to pass in a round, you will receive the starting player tile, which is worth one victory point. That's one-tenth of what you're after, because once you get ten points you win unless someone else collects more until the game finishes at the end of the current round. That's why good timing is vitally important. The race to see who passes first is the main reason why you can't just tap all





Cube Exchange: The Final Act

The third game in the CENTURY trilogy, first introduced in 2017, builds on the core game system of cube translation and adds a worker placement aspect to delineate it from the previous games using the original concept.

The first game in the series focused on cube translation and acquisition in order to satisfy a target mix of cubes on a victory point card and this produced a very fast game. My introduction to the CENTURY - SPICE ROAD was four player games in 50 minutes. The yellow-red-green-brown upgrade for cubes was so quick using your hand of action cards and this was very satisfying as you claimed the card you had been aiming to get just before your opponents.

The second game in the series took a different approach. While the cube translation process was the same (reminding me of the yellow-green-brown-grey transition in 18xx

games), the card translation changed to moving a ship over different hexes to utilize the benefits conferred by the lands to upgrade your cubes. There was more to study, but you've received a similar feel to the game as orders were satisfied. Some of the speed was lost for a different approach, but this still produced an enjoyable game.

In this latest incarnation, which is a worker placement variant, most locations allow players to add their workers to provide them with either new resources (cubes) or a translation process, such as changing two lower-valued cubes to higher ones. Each location requires a specific number of workers, but these can be bumped by another

player using one more worker to do so. As each player only starts with six workers, another action is to retrieve them from all the locations.

The board uses four board sections, three of which are used in every game. This provides some change as the fourth segment is added from a choice of three. Each location also has some symbols on which are relevant when the orders are acquired.

Bonus options galore

The goal of the game is to score victory points from completing orders which are worth a variety of points. To do so, players place their workers on one of the four fort locations and pay the required color mix of resources from their stock, which holds the typical maximum number of ten cubes. In addition, the fort space enables them to claim one of the bonus tiles there – if any is left. You can only have three bonus tiles so once you've received your third one you cannot claim any more so some care must be taken to select the ones that help develop your own game engine.

When you fulfill an order, besides the victory points there will be one of four bonus icons on the order card. This may allow that player to use one less worker at a location that matches the symbol of the order card, or perhaps add bonus cubes when visiting certain locations. Some of the order cards provide extra workers taken from your supply which helps you take more actions before you are forced to remove your workers as your action. The final bonus allows you to take an exploration marker from a location which were randomly seeded onto some spaces at the beginning of the game. This also opens up that new location which will add more options for all players.

Once eight orders have been fulfilled by a player the game concludes in that round. Now points are scored for the victory points on the cards (which will make a majority of the points) as well as for having used your bonus tiles efficiently.

Clearly the game has its origins in the original version, but as the trilogy has





developed new ideas have been added. This hasn't greatly added to the rules overhead as the symbology is very easy to see and the game plays very quickly. Not only are turns quick as you only have one action to take, but also the game itself proceeds at a decent pace.

The components have to be judged within the price point and the size



of the box.

The pots for the colored cubes store in a very clever way to avoid using bags and allow for a fast set up. The boards are a trifle thin, but also double sided to allow more variation and can be combined with the previous two games in any combi-

nation to give a different game.

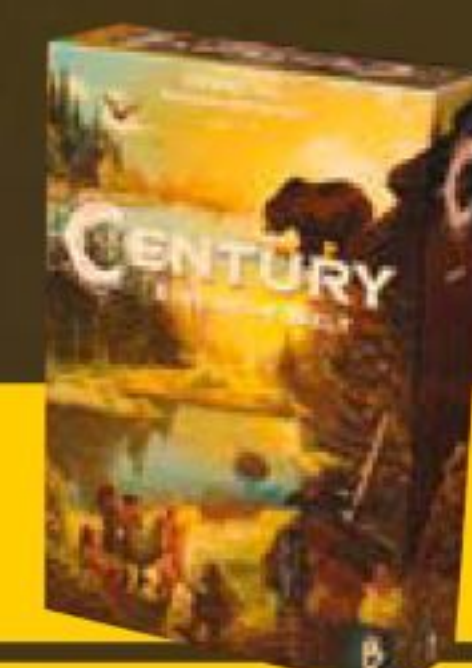
The worker meeples are small and larger ones would have been easier to handle.

The cards are of the same quality as the other two games which is very good and it is very easy to see what each order card requires to be satisfied. This means it's simple to see what is available to do no matter where you are sitting and helps play proceed quickly. Finally the rules are concise and easy to read and there are separate rule sets for each combination of games of the trilogy that you can play. This is a real bonus if you have any of the previous games of course.

Gameplay is also very smooth, partly because of the speed of the game, while the additional engine building aspects through bonus tiles and extra workers are what makes it very slightly more complicated than the original game. For my own point of view I prefer this game over the second game in the series, but I think the simplicity

and speed of the first game still make it the favorite one of the three. Still, I'm very pleased to have this game in my collection and Plan B have produced a very interesting and successful series of games.

Alan How



Title: **Century - A new world**
 Publisher: **Plan B Games**
 Designer: **Emerson Matsuuchi**
 Artist: **Atha Kanaani, Chris Quilliams**
 Players: **2-4 (for two: ↗)**
 Age: **about 8+ years**
 Duration: **about 45 minutes**
 Price: **about 35 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Alan How.....	7
Udo Bartsch.....	6
Christwart Conrad*	6
Wieland Herold.....	6

* The rating refers to the four-player game. The fewer participants, the smoother (and better) it plays. If the cards showing a compass appear only later on, the game progresses (too) slowly. The combination of all three games of the trilogy proves to be surprisingly smart, since their key aspects merge perfectly. Allow at least 15 minutes for preparation, including reading instructions spread over several sheets; the game itself, however, with a playing time of 60 to 90 minutes, doesn't feel too long.

FIND

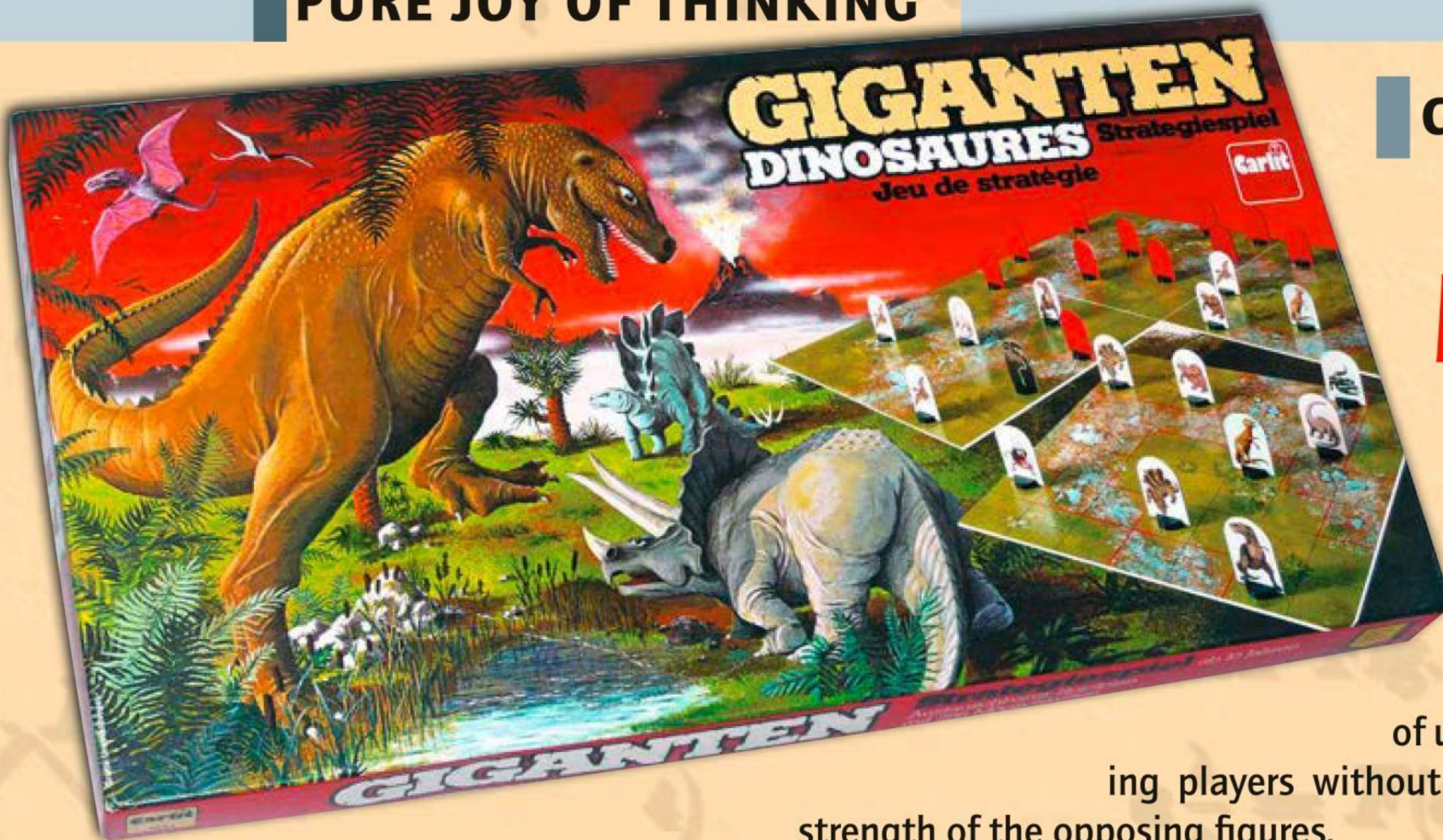
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ON**

KICKSTARTER

The project ends on Dec., 22nd





Concealment of game pieces

Masquerade

Something that is normal for cards is an exception on the game board; on the board, in the interest of clarity, usually a spade is called a spade. But on the other hand, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, somebody would come up with the idea of adding an element of uncertainty to an abstract thinking game by leaving players without complete information about the position and strength of the opposing figures.

This started with the large-scale war games of the early 19th century that served to educate officers and were meant to train them in the handling of incomplete information. After the Sino-Japanese War of 1894/95, the Japanese publisher Yahai Sawaki released **GUNJIN SHOGI**, the first commercial board game that contained figures, none of which could initially be identified by the opponent; Eisuke Nishiguchi was named as the author. The figures' strength depends on their rank in the military hierarchy, with the sole exception of spies, mines, and pioneers. The objective is to conquer one of the two opposing base fields.

Contrary to its title, **GUNJIN SHOGI** is not a variant of the Japanese **CHES** offshoot **SHOGI**. Since this, literally translated, means "General's Game," the name is suitable for any kind of game with a military hierarchy of figures.

For a better handling, the game requires an arbitrator, since the ranks of two encountering figures are supposed to remain hidden, only giving away either which one is the stronger one or whether both will be lost (if they have the same rank). This is the same in **LU ZHAN JUN QI**, a game that came out in China later on and is also known as **CHINESE ARMY CHES**. In 1980, in the congeneric **THE GENERALS** (Arxon), technological progress made it possible to replace the (not particularly entertaining) job of the arbitrator by an electronic contest of strength.

In 1909, the French woman Hermance Edan published her **L'ATTAQUE**, a game that was obviously inspired by **GUNJIN SHOGI**, and even received protection through a patent; from 1925 on, it was part of Gibson & Sons' product line. It might have been decisive for the licensing that Harry A. Gibson had produced **THE DOVER PATROL** since 1919, a variant that he adapted to naval war, which was probably not subject to any patent protection. After another inevitable variant, dealing with aerial combat, with the title **AVIATION** (1925), the game of **TRI-TACTICS** (1932) finally brought all three branches of military service together.

All these games, plus some others of a similar kind, have meanwhile fallen into oblivion. But in 1946, there was an advancement of this principle published in the Netherlands that became well established and spread worldwide: **STRATEGO**, by Jacques Johan Mogendorff. It has been in Jumbo's product line since 1952 and has become a modern

classic. Of course, the game led to numerous variants and themed editions. One of these games worth mentioning is **STRATEGO WATERLOO**, by Jason St. Just – released on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of that 1815 battle and implemented in keeping with the theme in an admirably appropriate manner.

To determine the winner of a combat in Roland Sieger's **WATERLOO** (Relaxx, 1998), the simple contest of strength is replaced by a complicated bidding and deducting procedure. The recently published **STRATEGO** offshoot **SPIES & LIES** demonstrates how this can be done at a much faster pace through a display of cards.

With his game **GIGANTEN** (Carlit, 1981), Herbert Pinthus made the shift from a military conflict to the dinosaurs' struggle for survival. In contrast to the original, where the two lakes in the center had the function of just obstacles, here the terrain has an impact on the fighting power. The stronger a dinosaur is on land, the weaker his performance in the swamp, and vice versa. Thanks to this nice knack, there is no ranking order; however, as usual, the top dogs are only inferior to the very last link in the chain.

The great game author Alex Randolph did not shy away from adapting the principle of the concealment of figures to the venerable game of **CHES**. In his **MIMIKRI** (3M, 1971), only the king fights out in the open. His entourage, reduced to eight followers, is put together randomly and lined up in front of him. Since you move and capture according to the usual rules, you need to con-





sides are identical. But where you have positioned them is revealed to your opponent only when the screen is removed from the center line, so that the opponent – unlike in SHUURO – has not been able to react immediately. You move a piece one step at a time or by jumping over another piece. Jumped-over opposing figures are removed from the board. Capturing, however, is only a means to the end of occupying a certain square in the opponent's back area.

At the beginning of MIMIKRI, only the identity of the figures is in the dark, and in FRUNDSBERG, it's only their starting position; but in KRIEGSPIEL (1899), the entire affair is shrouded in dense fog. The only known fact in this CHESS variant is the opponent's usual starting position. But which figure he'll move where can be determined only later, when figures encounter one another or when the arbitrator (who is indispensable in this game) makes an announcement. Only the arbitrator records the exact positions of all figures on his board, whereas the two players try to speculatively document the development on their boards.

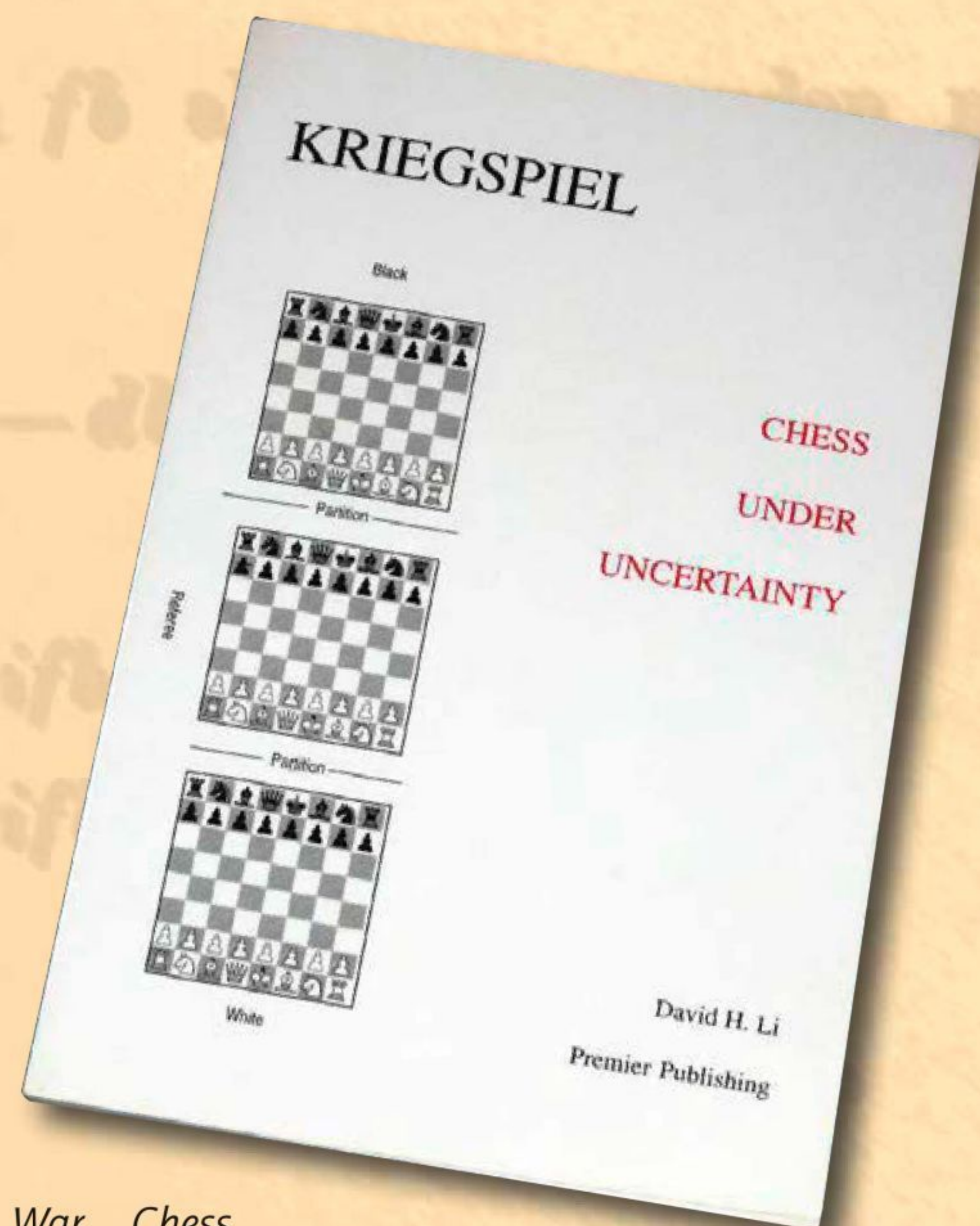
The idea of this game came from London journalist Michael Henry Temple, with the intention of giving members of his chess club a bit of diversion. This was met with so much approval that H. Cayley presented the brochure *Kriegspiel*, or

clude the identity of an opposing figure from its respective moving pattern.

In the interest of equal opportunity as an essential feature of games (as the author well appreciated), it is advisable to grant players a budget to recruit troops at their own discretion, and then employ a targeted positioning of each. This had already been demonstrated in the **GAME OF CALCULATION**, a game that, according to John Beasley in *The Classified Encyclopedia of Chess Variants* (2007), dates back to 1806, or even earlier.

More recently, the renowned tabletop designer Alessio Cavatore used this fair and appealing method for his **SHUURO** (River Horse, 2008), a game that, due to its drastically increased number of figures, allows for many different and even extreme orientations. On the considerably enlarged battlefield, the king may surround himself with a harem of several queens, have a cavalry with numerous knights spread out, or surprise his opponent with a many-headed army of pawns. Besides the composition of the opposing troops, it is uncertain for now where their members will be called into action in the first three rows, one after another.

In Kurt Heuser's **FRUNDSBERG** (F.X. Schmid, 1973), all 24 figures on both



War Chess

(1905), and related columns were established in various chess magazines. After WW I, however, the interest faded away, probably because of the expenditure of material and personnel. It wasn't until 1994 that the subject was dealt with again, when David H. Li, in *Kriegspiel - Chess under Uncertainty* (Premier Publishing), gave 144 pages of valuable advice and extensive game analyses – an impressive attestation that this was indeed not just a defunct notion.

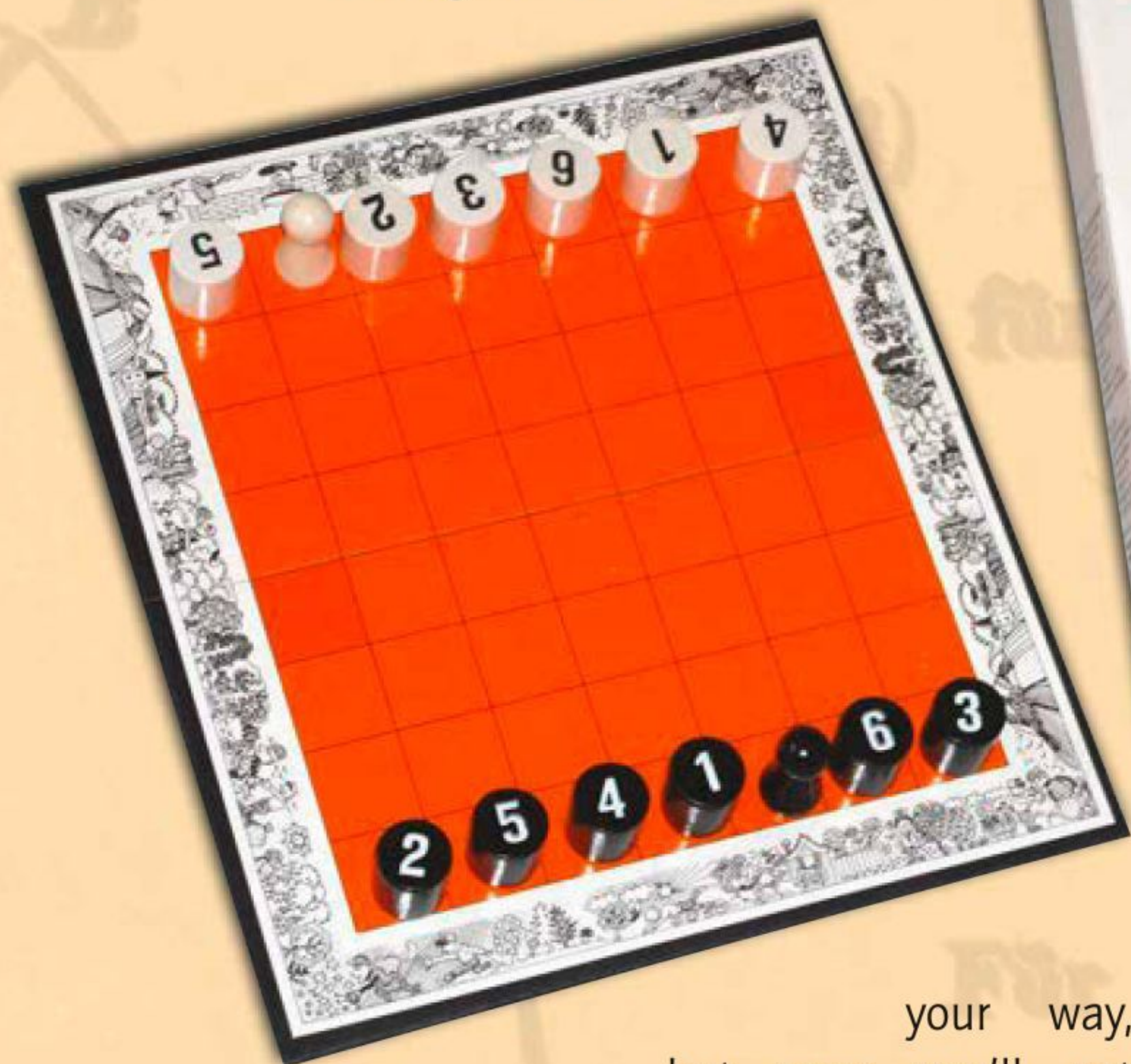
In **JEKYLL & HYDE** (Waddingtons, 1980), in Germany known under the title **GEISTER**, Alex Randolph offers a clash between two groups of figures that look totally the same. Each group consists of

Ghostbusters:
Alex Randolph playing GEISTER against an amused opponent



four good and four evil ghosts. There are different paths to success: Either, you kill all good ghosts of your opponent, or your opponent kills all your evil ones. The third winning condition would be to move one of your good ghosts off the board from one of your opponent's corner spaces.

At the beginning, you can easily shoo away any ghost coming across



your way, but soon you'll get into a dilemma. If, for example, an opposing ghost is rushing towards one of the two exits, you'll have to stop him, of course. But who can be sure if the other player is just bluffing? But if he is, and approaches you with an evil ghost, you might lose the game with the next capture. Therefore it is advisable to just block this ghost's way for the time being – preferably with an evil ghost that you would like captured...

In Valéry Fourcade's **ATTAKUBE** (Dujardin, 2001), you try to take several cubes off the board by moving them through a gate in your opponent's baseline, and you win if you reach five victory points. Depending on the gate, an individual score ranges from 1 to 3, so that you normally need to bring through at least two cubes. However, each cube has a special ability that you can use when its identity is revealed. Sometimes the moving direction or moving range changes; other times,

a destructive power is released. And with the ability of doubling the point value, the game can even be decided by one cube, similar to **JEKYLL & HYDE**.

In Rudi Hoffmann's **RETTE SICH WER KANN** (Schmidt, 1968), up to four groups of bathers are in an elongated swimming pool. Instead of moving one or two spaces in short strokes, swimmers can be converted into crocodiles that plow through the water at different speeds in order to satiate their appetite. In the end, crocodiles that have reached their target space are scored – plus the swimmers they ate. It is astonishing that Kosmos reanimated this game in 2003 with the same odd theme as part of their "Games for two" series, and that the changes were basically limited to abolishing the eating of one's own swimmers and conspecifics.

The same author invented **RÄUBER UND GENDARM** (Bütehörn, 1981; republished later on by Schmidt Spiele and renamed **GANOVEN**

JAGD). Each player sends out six police officers for chasing the opposing robber. But only one of the six has the secret authorization to arrest the crook. Since all figures may move more than just one step, jump over one or more of the others, and even make chain moves, the game usually ends pretty quickly.

DREH MICH UM (Parker, 1970) plays completely without captures. It lives on the chaos and the confusion that comes up when all four players, starting from the four edges of the board, move and jump their six game pieces that all look the same from the outside, trying to get to the opposite side. If someone challenges the ownership of a piece, the player who is wrong loses a turn. And if a player abducts another player's piece without being challenged, he'll hardly have any chance to be the first to finish. In the similar game **CHAOS**, released three years later as part of the "Schmidt Spiele-Bar," the sanction in the case of a challenge is considerably more severe: If the player is wrong, he loses one piece; this is significant for the final scoring after all remaining pieces have arrived. Nevertheless, many games end in a tie.

It is nice to see that the pure joy of thinking isn't necessarily diminished if players have to do without complete information about the opposing personnel; instead, they are forced to gradually get the information on their own in an efficient way.

L. U. Dikus/sbw



Long Live the Doubt!

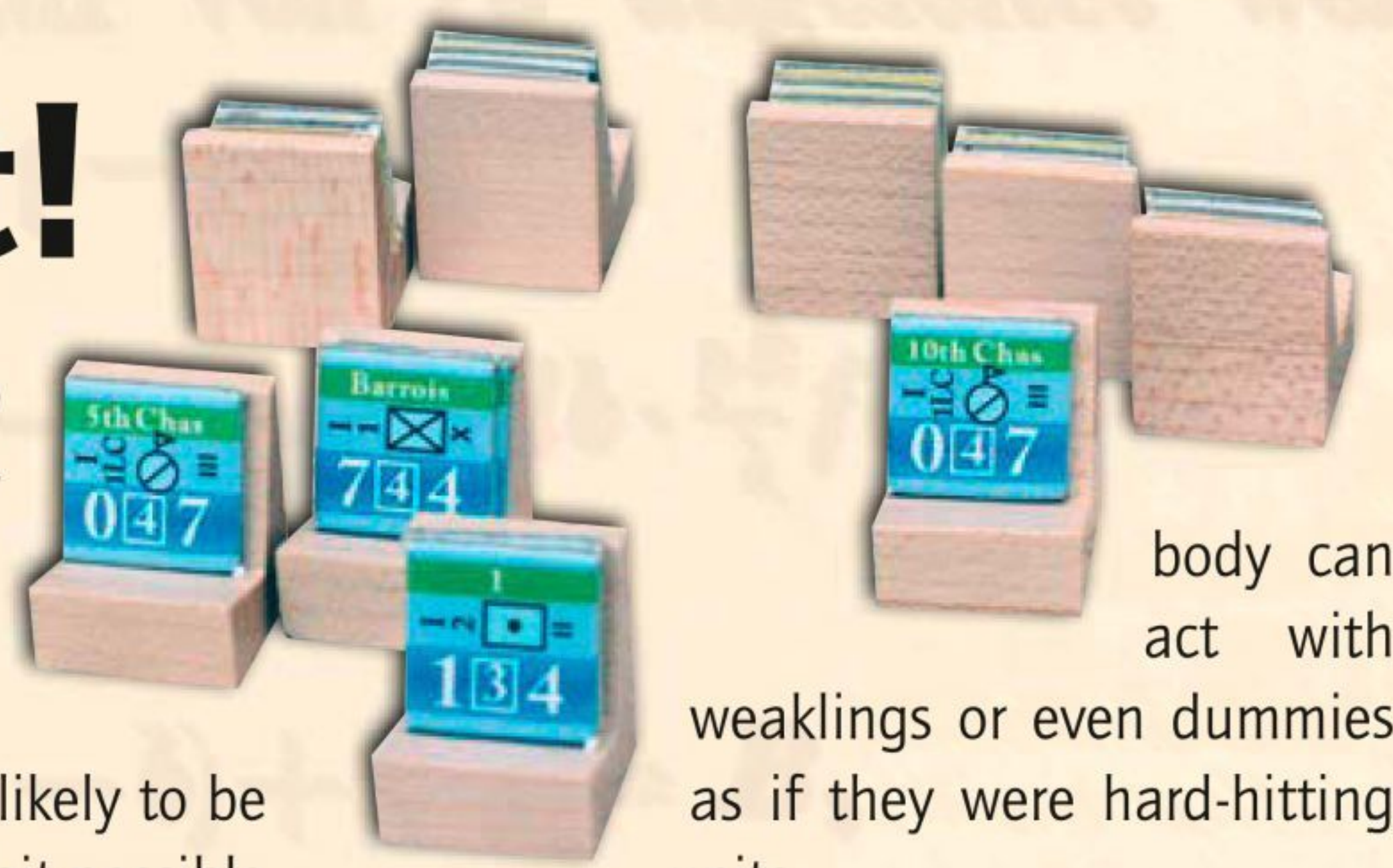
The technical term "conflict simulation" for war games is misleading. If players move a few game figures across a map in comfortable, well-heated and well-lit friendly surroundings, some essential features of actual military conflicts are missing – features, however, that nobody would like to see simulated: dirt and stench, uncontrolled exuding of body fluids as a consequence of blunt force, and the fear that something like this might happen to you or your comrade. So it might be appropriate to leave out such features, considering the fact that war games focus on a command level, where the well-being of an individual soldier is of no importance and the fate of units containing thousands of individuals is decided upon in order to accomplish overriding goals. It remains undecided if this can be associated at all with the joy of thinking; but given the random factor affecting the events, it is certainly not "pure" joy. The topic of the concealment of figures that the article deals with, however, downright suggests making a connection to the playful simulation of conflicts that is basically also inherent in CHESS.

Even if any negative references to reality have been taken away, conflict simulations – though they are able to illustrate the starting situation of battles or wars – suffer from descending into the field of speculation from the moment when the first game piece is moved. Even if, due to random factors, you can't predict the outcome of each individual combat, let alone where your opponent will move his pieces, the units' initial strengths and their goals, normally, are obvious. As for reinforcements, players can even look ahead if the place and time of the appearance of the comrades is fixed, irrespective of the development on the battlefield.

Even back in ancient times, military reconnaissance achieved remarkable success. That means that commanders

did not completely have to shuffle fog; but in the American Civil War, soldiers still had to first find their enemy before they could start defeating him. There was not likely to be any chance to detect and exploit possible weaknesses. Therefore, all conflict simulations should ideally take place with an umpire who provides only select information to the actively involved players. For people like us, this is wishful thinking; for real military training of professionals, however, umpires were already employed almost 200 years ago.

Using face down units is somewhat more practicable. There is no doubt about their position on the battlefield, but at least about their characteristics. But with a certain size of game, it hampers the fun if you have to memorize who is standing where, or constantly have to peek under your cardboard pieces; this applies also to the use of placeholders that somewhere show the strength they represent (e.g., on separate boards, such as in *WON BY THE SWORD*, see spielbox 7/2016). In 1972, Tom Dalgliesh started to cast doubt in a highly elegant manner when he released *QUEBEC 1759*, and thus created the soon so-called block games genre under the label Gamma Two (nowadays, Columbia Games). Since then, these war games made it possible to withhold information about the kind and combat strength of a unit; and any possible losses can also, discreetly and easily, be marked by rotating the blocks. Not to know whether you are confronted with two weakened conscripts, or two dragoons in full gear, gives your decisions in the battle playing area a completely new quality. And such block games become a great show if some-



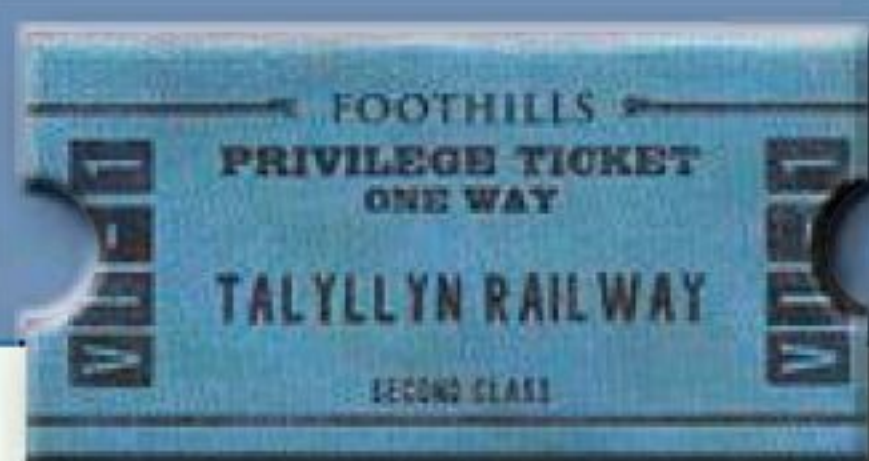
body can act with weaklings or even dummies as if they were hard-hitting units.

Minor aids allow players to turn almost any conflict simulation into a block game. However, most of these games require a proper bag full of little standees, called counter sleds (www.napoleongames.com). They are slanted in such a way that, in most cases, up to five cardboard counters can fit into a more or less upright position. Their owner can recognize the type and strength of the first unit, at least, whereas the player on the opposite side sees nothing but the neutral wooden back of the sled. When you use counter sleds, a fast – and, in other respects, rather weak – cavalry can become the eyes of the army (actually, the exceptional fact that the cavalry was absent significantly contributed to Robert E. Lee's defeat at Gettysburg). If you are lacking the usual extensive information, then you learn to appreciate a thin line of outposts that might let you realize in time what you will have to face as the defender – and might allow you to shift your forces accordingly.

The term "simulation" is inappropriate, even if the commonly far too comprehensive amount of information is limited; but without such a restriction, the course of some conflicts is completely inexplicable – just think of the encirclement battle at Tannenberg in 1914. Apart from that, the dispensation of godlike omniscience in exchange for gnawing doubts profoundly increases the playing appeal of nearly all wargames.

Matthias Hardel/sbw





Some Might Miss the Bad Weather

Tony Boydell's game SNOWDONIA based on clearing rubble from tracks to build a railway to Snowdonia was published seven years ago and recently re-released on Kickstarter in a deluxe version. What went under the radar was his two-player game set in the same arena, for which Tony teamed up with Ben Bateson. This was released at UK Games Expo in the early summer but was in very limited quantities. Fortunately, I managed to acquire a copy as I liked his earlier game.

This two-player version incorporates many of the elements of SNOWDONIA, but with its own distinct feel. Players are collecting resources, removing rubble, building track and stations and unlocking more action opportunities to score victory points.

The game comes from Lookout, so the expectation was that the game would be good and the presentation would be polished. Interestingly, in this day when inserts are becoming a major element to the overall presentation of the game, there is no insert in this game. Fortunately, it's not necessary and everything fits quite neatly into the box.

The set-up of the game provides significant variation, increasing replayability. There are eight railway lines to choose from which are created using good quality cards to show the line and each is in a different color to ease identification.

Only six are required, and all the cards for each line are placed in a row. Lines vary in length and some locations have two cards to show the station but mostly each

card represents one location. The cards show common design features, many of which will be familiar to SNOWDONIA players. First, there is rubble on the line, represented by a number of brown cubes. These have to be cleared in order to extend the line. Then there is the spot for the station which has to be built out of iron ore and stone. Once the station has been built, this opens up an action space for your surveyor to be moved to thus making an additional option available.

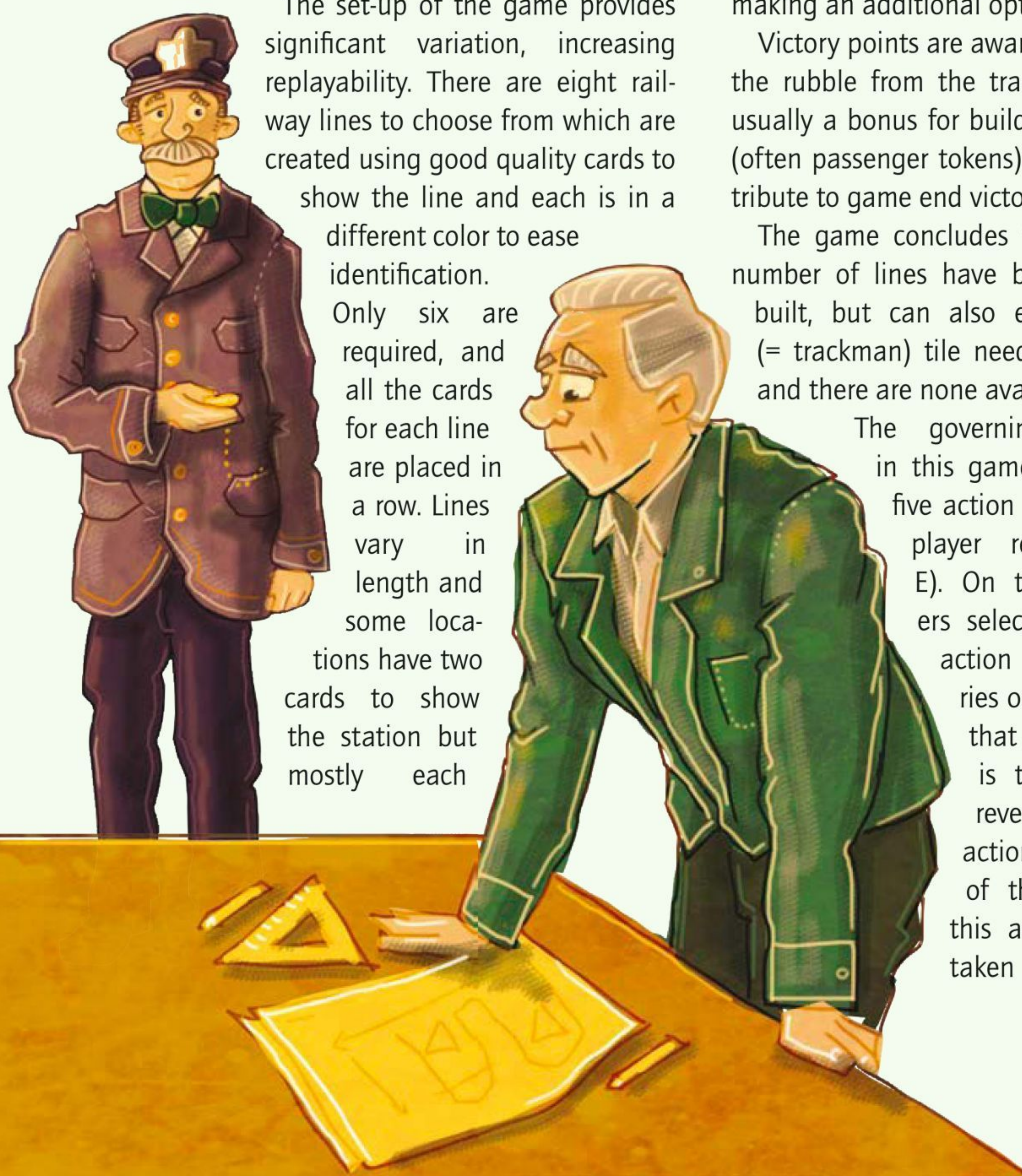
Victory points are awarded for clearing the rubble from the track and there is usually a bonus for building the station, (often passenger tokens) which will contribute to game end victory points. The game concludes when a certain number of lines have been completely built, but can also end if a navy (= trackman) tile needs to be placed and there are none available.

The governing mechanism in this game is a series of five action cards that each player receives (A to E). On their turn players select one of these action cards and carries out the action on that card. The card is then flipped to reveal a different action on the back of that card. Once this action has been taken at a later time,

the card will be flipped again revealing the original action. This system provides considerable flexibility over the sequence and choices of actions to be taken.

Constant card flipping

For example, card A allows three resources to be taken from the stockyard, which is a common area for iron ore and stone to be stored. This will allow a player to build a station using card D. If a player wants to remove some rubble from the line, they can use the excavation card (card B) whose reverse action card allows building a station but requires paying additional rubble. There is a small image of the back shown in the corner of each card which is very helpful. Gradually, lines are built and stations claimed by the player who built that station. This is important at the end of the game as the player who built more stations on each line will earn some victory points.





When cubes are drawn from the bag to replenish the stockyard, there are some event cubes that indicate that a third party has built a line. This is indicated by placing a navy token on that card location. There are a finite number of navy tiles. Therefore, if too many white event cubes are drawn the game can end due to an empty stock of navy tiles when one is needed. Fortunately you can plan for this, so it

usually doesn't come as a shock.

One of the action cards allows for your surveyor to move to an action space and perform the action. The action space becomes available once a station has been built either by a player or through a navy event. These surveyor actions provide different ways in which you can gather resources, exchange resources or acquire passengers.



The selection of actions on the primary side usually shows those actions that you're more interested in taking but in order to recover them you have to play the less desirable action on the other side. This sometimes means taking what feels like a worse action and in a game where you are racing

to achieve a particular goal it feels frustrating to take a sub optimal action. Once you have played the game a few times you realize that you can make better use of these cards through better planning.

It's hard to keep your plans secret

As both players are acting in turn, it is very difficult to set up a situation that prevents the opponent from interfering with your plans. It is always advisable to keep an eye on the other player's range of options. Sometimes you just hope that the other player won't notice what you're trying to do. It is satisfying when your plans come to fruition of course, but this also means that the other player is probably happy that you avoided doing something that interfered with his plans.

The final, but important action space, is visiting the pub using card E which allows you to set aside one of your action cards that shows a way in which victory points can be scored at the end of the game. For example, one of the cards will aim to score 1 victory point for each station that you have built. You replace this action card with one of the same letter from the general supply, but these cards have a slightly different combination of actions from the original starting set of cards. There is some interesting planning involved in this as there are only two extra cards to take of each letter and the new card arrives with its primary side showing,



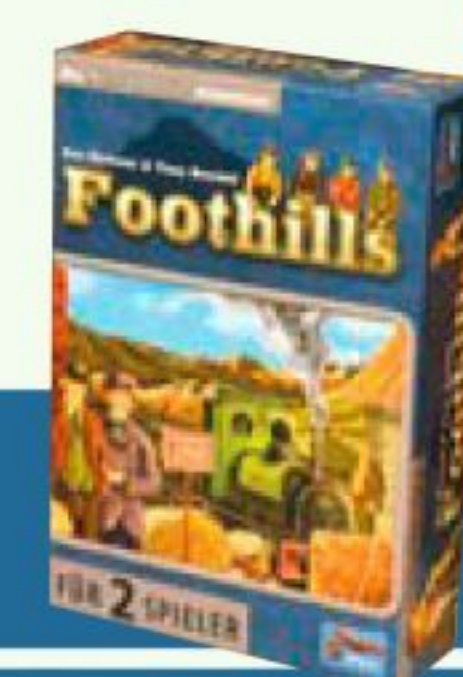
which may allow an action to be taken more quickly.

It's a clever way in which you score your points and it is possible to score multiple cards with the same target to double or triple up the benefit that you are focusing on. All the games that I've played have been very tight on the final scoring, which perhaps is not surprising as turns alter-

nate and each player is trying to squeeze out a marginal benefit.

Nevertheless, FOOTHILLS is an extremely enjoyable and a very solid offspring of SNOWDONIA. Many of the concepts are similar, but the action card process is very clever in allowing the planning of your actions as well as how you are aiming to score game end victory points. Some, however, might miss the bad weather.

Alan How



Title: Foothills
Publisher: Lookout
Designer: Ben Bateson, Tony Boydell
Artist: Klemens Franz
Players: 2
Age: about 10+ years
Duration: about 45-60 minutes
Price: about 33 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Alan How.....	8
Udo Bartsch.....	4
L. U. Dikus*.....	6
Matthias Hardel**.....	6

* Drags on much longer than the approximately 30 minutes suggested on the box, which takes away from the actual high appeal of the change of action.
** Unfortunately, doesn't compare to the great paragon of SNOWDONIA.

Successful on Kickstarter

There are as many game mechanics as there are grains of sand at the beach. Some are easy to implement, others more difficult. One of the trickiest is direct confrontation with one player attacking another to deal damage or steal resources. **RISE OF TRIBES** has players interacting the hard way.

While direct conflict in two-player games is comparatively easy to implement, there are several hurdles in a multi-player setting. It's also frowned upon these days to eliminate players the way it's done in *Risk*, or to knock players down so far that they can't come back. Now, the consequences of a conflict have to be felt; otherwise, why bother? But on the other hand, they have to be moderate enough that they don't break anyone's neck.

It is an especially difficult mechanism since conflicts don't work the same with different player counts. With three, there's the risk that two players fight such that the third, uninvolved player benefits. Or that two gang up on one, thereby taking away that player's chance of victory. Added to this is the kingmaker problem, whereby a player who isn't in the lead can decide who wins the game by attacking another player during the last turn.

Above all, direct confrontation needs the right group. Everyone needs to be able to handle being the target sometimes and to take eventual setbacks without complaint. In addition, players have to have the skill to read the game state and direct their aggression against the leader when necessary. It's easy to understand why many modern games completely avoid this kind of conflict, just to be on the safe side.

In **RISE OF TRIBES**, which was promoted as a development and conquest game with a short playing time, combat belongs to

the normal range of options.

With your ancient tribe, you expand through a modular landscape, collecting resources and investing them in technologies or by building villages. You collect points through these same villages and with goal cards, which provide you with simple tasks like, "occupy three forest fields."

Straight-forward game play

There are four actions: grow, move, gather and lead (draw cards). The way that actions are triggered is innovative. The "engine" is the special dice that each contain two suns, two moons and two blank sides. On a separate board, three dice slots are assigned to each action, on which dice are placed at the beginning of the game. Each turn, you roll two extra six-sided dice and assign these to two of the four actions. The new die displaces one of the existing ones, triggering the action.

The strength of the action depends on what the remaining dice show. Two suns intensify the action, a pair of lunar sides weakens it. All other combinations trigger the action at default strength. For example, normally you get three new tribe members when growing. With a pair of suns, on the other hand, you get four, and with a pair of moons, only two. The effect depends in part on your own luck with the dice, but also on which dice other players left for you. This means that die roll results impact not only the current player, but also the one coming up next.



Using this mechanic, you go through a fairly straightforward

process: recruit new members of your tribe (grow), spread out (move), and generate resources in the fields you occupy (gather). You invest these resources either by constructing villages that regularly pour out victory points or by purchasing card-shaped technologies. The latter gives you advantages, like increased movement range or improved production capability.

Occasional event cards shake things up a bit. For example, they may give the players resources or have them deal with the effects of predators. As long as there is enough space on the board, figures of different colors tend to coexist peacefully, even on the same hex tile. It becomes serious when six or more meeples share a space after movement or growth, because that's when conflict breaks out automatically. These struggles are down-to-earth.





Meeples from each involved player are removed at the same time until only one tribe remains, similar to how it works in *CIVILIZATION* or *SMALL WORLD*.

As soon as someone collects 15 victory points, the game immediately ends, which usually takes just under an hour.

I The other side of the coin

RISE OF TRIBES flows intuitively. It sports a slim, well-structured rulebook. Game play can be quickly understood even by new players. At the beginning, everyone concentrates on growing their own tribe, gathering resources and making sensible investments. Of course, technologies that increase the efficiency of one's own actions are very popular. But being well equipped doesn't help you if no points come out of it. *RISE OF TRIBES* is a short racing-style game: those who take too long optimizing their abilities are likely to lose to those who prefer snagging quick victory points. Villages are expensive, but are worth one victory point each turn, which is both an attractive investment and a target likely to attract interest from your opponents.

After a few games, the other side of the coin becomes apparent in *Rise of TRIBES*. Since the efficiency of your actions depends on die rolls, players are well advised to focus less attention on them and instead invest in technology cards. However, since the cards that are available are also random,

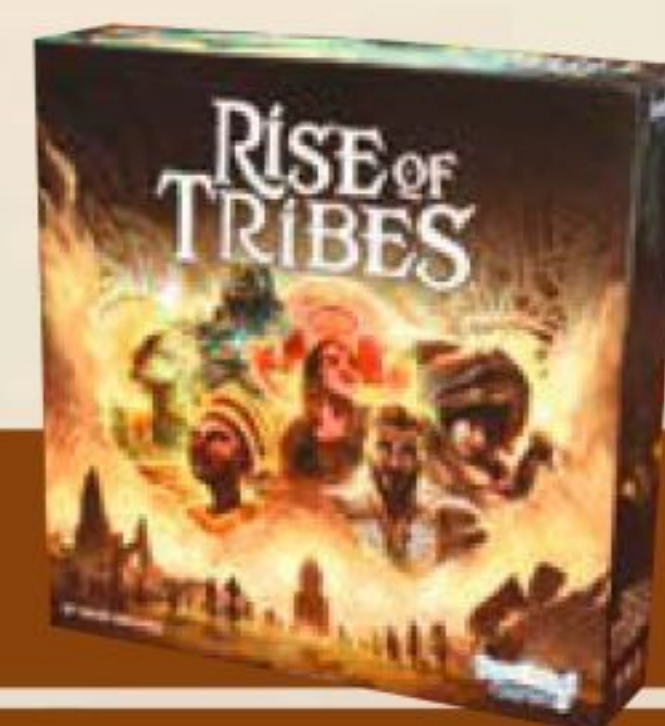
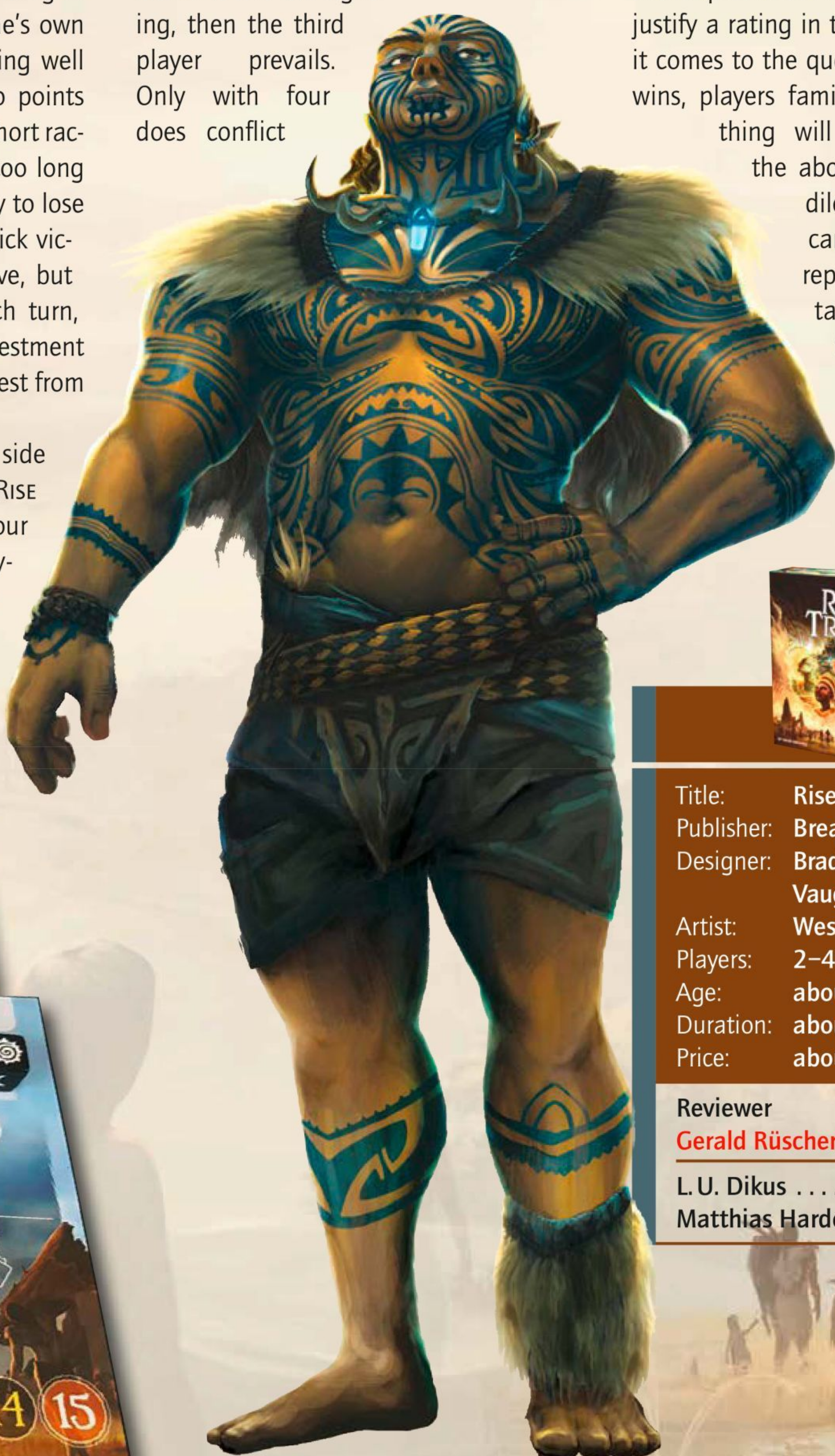
those who snag a good technology early are easily better off than their opponents. In cases when one player gets the obvious lead, the question arises for the opponents: do we stop the leader? And if so, who's in charge of it? After all, attacks cost both the action to set it up and some hard-earned components in the form of exchanged figures. With two players, conflicts are almost always a zero-sum game, best suited to deny your opponent a specific arrangement of meeples. More than once, I've seen two stubborn players neutralize each other over multiple rounds, mutually wasting any chance of victory.

With three, the well-known situation arises: If two are fighting, then the third player prevails. Only with four does conflict

really work – and then only if everyone really gets into it. If even one player stays out of the fray, the balance disappears, which can cause tension: "You never help slow down the leader!" The displeasure is completely justified, because the player who stays out most skillfully usually wins.

RISE OF TRIBES was a very successful Kickstarter project, with more than \$380,000 collected, and it shines with many attractive elements: a streamlined set of rules, fluid play, sturdy and pretty components, but above all, an innovative and intelligent core mechanic in the form of dice placement. All qualities that would justify a rating in the 8 range. But when it comes to the question of who actually wins, players familiar with this kind of thing will inevitably recognize the above-mentioned conflict dilemma, and know it cannot be resolved with repeated plays. That certainly affects the long-term fun, unless you're ready to accept quite a bit of randomness in determining the winner.

Gerald Rüscher/sb



Title: **Rise of Tribes**
Publisher: **Breaking Games**
Designer: **Brad Brooks, Peter Vaughan**
Artist: **Wes Straub, Marshall Gill**
Players: **2-4**
Age: **about 12+ years**
Duration: **about 30-60 minutes**
Price: **about 40 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Gerald Rüscher	6
L. U. Dikus	7
Matthias Hardel	7



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Shadows From the Past

In his adaptation of the Watergate affair, Matthias Cramer demonstrates how an American president can get himself out of any predicament by using cover-ups, bribery and surprising maneuvers. Cramer successfully captures all characters involved, so much so that the events of the early 1970s become alive before the mind's eye. To all those younger people out there I should mention that, unlike today, it was almost inconceivable in those days that a president could be guilty of any crime, let alone several of them.

No impeachment has ever succeeded in the history of the USA. But for Richard Nixon, it would have, so Tricky Dick evaded the consequences of the Watergate affair by resigning in 1974. Nixon was still sentenced when his immunity ended, but his former vice-president, Gerald Ford, pardoned and saved him from imprisonment. In the Cramer game, the Nixon administration may save its president, despite all the investigations carried out by the journalists of the Washington Post, provided that the admins get the right hand cards, at the right time, to block the investigations. On the other hand, Woodward and Bernstein, for the journalists' side, have every chance of uncovering and exposing the government's deceitful web of lies. But they have to be quick, because time is on Nixon's side. The Cramer duel is an asymmetric confrontation with a wonderful flair for history.

Authentic chain of evidence

For the card-driven gameplay, the designer provides a mere 20 special cards each for the administration and the editorial staff. Events and characters are, to a large extent, authentically and historically adapted. The Washington Post staff must use their cards to create an unbroken chain of evidence that exposes Nixon's connections to two informants. If Nixon manages to pull five of the nine so-called momentum tokens over to his side, he saves his neck.

In WATERGATE, the term "chain of evidence" is to be taken literally. The tug-of-war between administration and fourth power takes place on a stylized pinboard that depicts Nixon's network of relationships with seven informants. They have

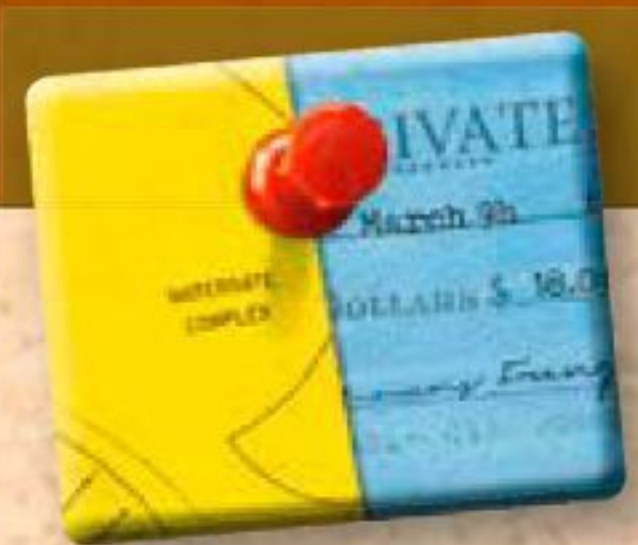
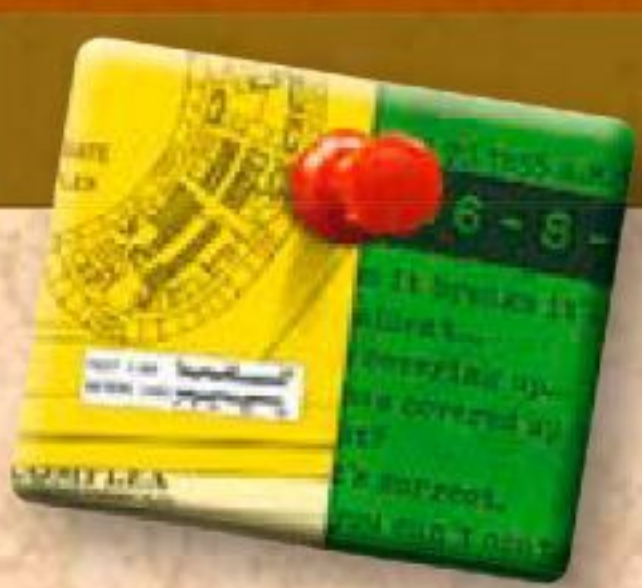
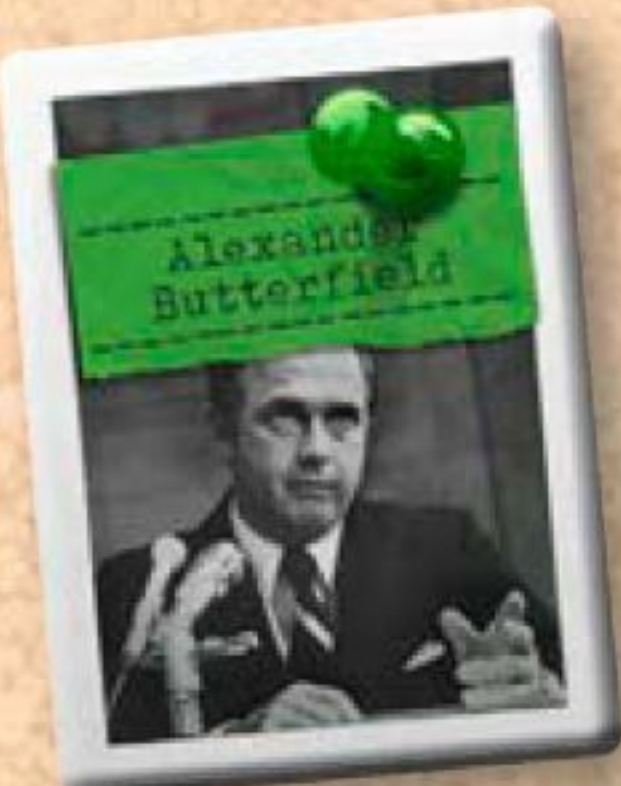
to be activated first, and they run the risk of being silenced by the other side sooner or later. The journalist side has to prove Nixon's connections by means of evidence tiles placed on the pinboard, which the administration, of course, tries to withhold or suppress. During the round, the opponents score their numerical card activities on a track at the side of the board.

At the beginning of the round, a momentum and an initiative token are placed in the center of this track, complemented by three evidence tiles drawn face-down from a bag by the Nixon side. The sovereignty over the evidence lies in the hands of the administration, and whether the press can gain access depends on their activities.

The reporters initially have the initiative and may therefore draw five cards from their stack, while the president has to make do with only four. Both opponents take turns deploying their cards, always deciding whether they want to use a card's numerical value or the depicted event. The latter is usually prefera-

ble because it has a stronger effect, but also the disadvantage that it normally removes the card permanently from play.

When you use the numerical value, one or more evidence tiles can be moved correspondingly by one to four spaces in your direction. This may also happen through events, some of which also, or alternatively, allow you to move the initiative and momentum tokens. In addition, events can be used to





call forward informants. Or they can be bribed, and in that way, burned for the journalists' side.

At the end of a turn, one side receives the momentum token, provided it is lying within their area, and each side may place the evidence that has landed on their side. Using the face-up evidence tiles, the reporters want to lay out a continuous path from

place are already sufficient for the press to half fulfill their goal. But if the president manages to surround his central position with six face-down tiles of evidence, he most likely manages to get out of a tight spot. The spaces on the pinboard each show one of three colors, which must be taken into account when making the chain, so it is by no means trivial to lay out the evidence. Double-color evidence tiles are particularly desirable, as they provide more placement options.

Since evidence gets onto the board at the end of the round and placed there by the occasional event, the obstacles created on the board lead to detours. On the other hand, there is constant fighting, on the track to the side of the board, about who starts in the next round and who receives the momentum token, five of which secure Nixon's political survival. For the president, it would even be good enough if there were no more momentum tokens to be placed. But they provide the reporters with long-term benefits, for example, from the third token onwards, they can influence evidence tokens. So better they get hold of none of the red tokens.

Thematically intensive

As a duel about truth and cover-up, WATERGATE has a thematic intensity second to none. Despite that, the game is straightforward and easy to learn. The only thing you need to consider carefully is how you play the cards, especially if using an event causes you to permanently remove a high-value card. It is always a huge benefit if you take a closer look at both sets of cards, if possible, before the second game.

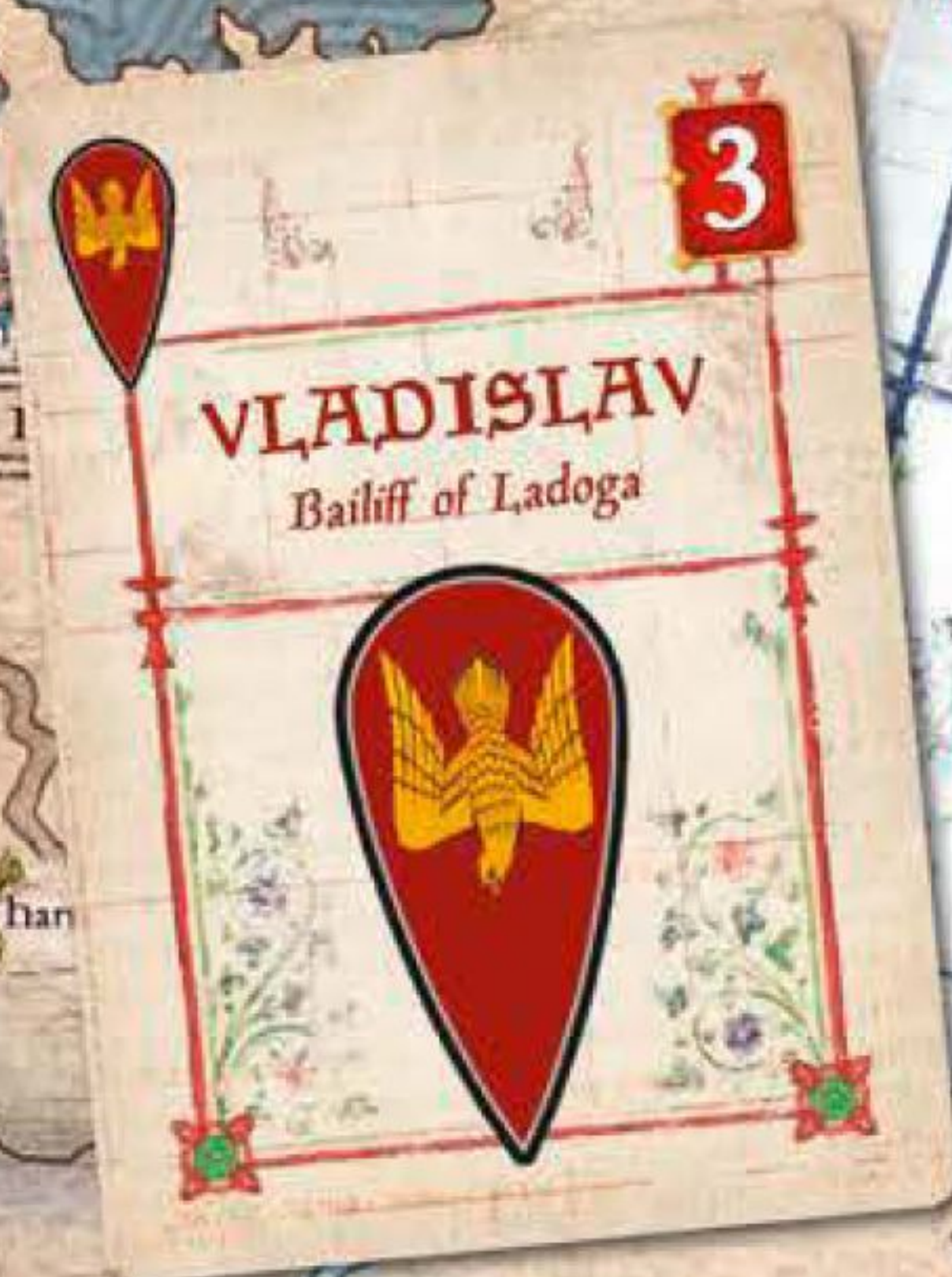
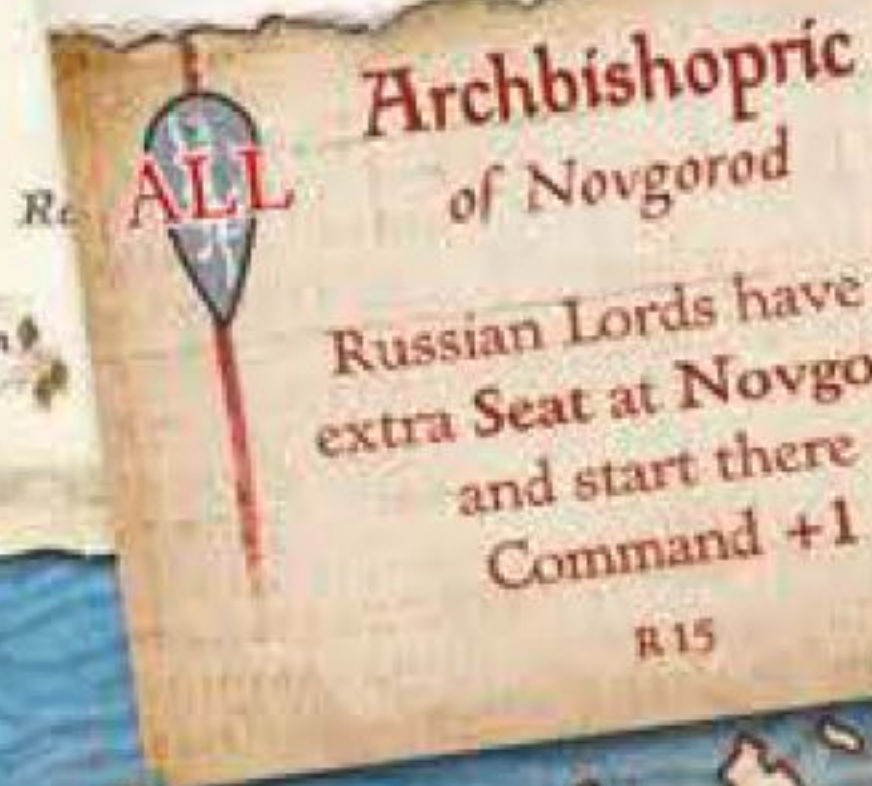
It might seem that the administration is stronger here, because they can fall back on more aggressive action cards. This way, Nixon can end the round immediately with an action or secure the momentum token for himself. Compared to that, the reversal of the movement of evidence tiles, or the double usage of action cards, seem comparatively lame. Both sides certainly play very differently. If you take on the editors, you actually feel as if you are engaged in tedious

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research work, while the administration never seems to grow tired of throwing a spanner/wrench in your works, all the while collecting one momentum token after the other.

WATERGATE is exciting entertainment combined with a well-documented trip into history. The background information supplied here by Viktor Kobilke's editorial staff is a real gem and should serve as a model for all historical games. More than half of the over 20 pages of the rulebook are devoted to the historical background. Kobilke, who recently transferred from eggertspiele in Hamburg to Frosted Games in Berlin, also made sure that there are none of the flawed rulebooks so common with the latter in the past.

Well balanced, always exciting. There is almost nothing to criticize here. At most, you could be troubled by the typical luck dependency of card-driven games. And indeed, it is important for the reporters' side to get their hands on their informants fairly early on, before the administration succeeds in bringing them in line. With a playing time of 30 to 45 minutes, it is easy to deal with such rare card constellations. Most matches are balanced and exciting. For the first few games, I recommend you do not constantly change roles, but continue with the same side several times in a row, in order to identify its many options and make the most of them once they become available. When

you swap sides later, then you know what to expect.

Often enough in WATERGATE, you feel reminded of the Washington of today. There are plenty of characters similar to Nixon's co-conspirator John Ehrlichman in the current Trump administration, people who (to quote Ehrlichman) "renounce their moral judgment and cede it to someone else." If Matthias Nagy of Frosted Games still publishes board games with a strong historical theme in ten years' time, we might get confronted with Trump's intrigues of today, that is, if there will actually be a successful impeachment or Trump resigns, like Nixon. However, a certain detachment is necessary here, because – quite honestly – I really would not want to take on the role of Trump. At least Nixon, ended United States involvement in the Vietnam War, although it is still hard to forgive him for allowing the plunge into the opposition party's office and bugging it.

Wieland Herold/cs

** Iceberg yes, Nixon no.

Board games should address topics of cultural and social relevance, not only provide leisure activity and entertainment. A game like WATERGATE is therefore much to be welcomed. Not only is the investigative work of the journalists against Richard Nixon nicely implemented here. At the same time, each card is thematically well thought out and historically explained in the very long appendix to the rulebook. But this is exactly the reason why this game fails so spectacularly for me. If it were a movie or a book, you would ask: Is this a documentary or a work of fiction? As far as WATERGATE is concerned, you would have to answer that it cannot make up its mind. The components seem realistic and factual enough, but it is possible to actually turn the outcome of the Watergate affair on its head here.

If it was the Titanic, I could forgive this. Different weather, variation in ocean currents: Coincidence or fate can be plausibly represented here. However, in Watergate, it is not icebergs that are being pushed back and forth, but real people. Seven informants, all introduced with short biographies in the booklet, intervene through card action, sometimes as supporters of the Nixon administration, at other times recruited by the investigative journalists. That is presumptuous and very annoying in its generalized representation. Because this game is not about the coincidence of a change in the weather pattern, it is about people who, at the time, had the opportunity to make conscious decisions.

Anyone believing that the subject matter is super topical because of the possible Trump impeachment, be warned: The outcome is not a game result depending on randomly drawn cards. Rather, the protagonists are guided by a more or less distinctive ethical framework or represent specific interests. WATERGATE could only work as a game if it avoided the appearance of a realistic historical representation with an uncertain outcome. The chance to achieve a minimum of abstraction has been missed here.

Harald Schrapers/cs



Title: Watergate
Publisher: Frosted Games
Designer: Matthias Cramer
Artist: Klemens Franz
Players: 2
Age: about 12+ years
Duration: about 30–60 minutes
Price: about 25 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Wieland Herold	8
L. U. Dikus*	8
Matthias Hardel	8
Harald Schrapers**	5

* Forceful chain of evidence: very thematic, with clearly designed gameplay and balanced out fair chances.
** see box.

Matthias Cramer on Watergate, Weimar und Glen More II

Change to the Dark Side

spielbox: You are now here at the Hexacon [editor's note: annual meeting of the German Society for Historical Simulations] for the second time, do you attend as a gamer or for play testing?

Matthias Cramer: Both, actually. Last year I already brought along a prototype, which I can play test practically only here, because it is a rather complex game, very rich in history.

sb: Your publications so far were classic Euro games ...

MC: Yes and no. WATERGATE is actually a card-driven game, even though it has that typical Euro playing time of 45 minutes.

sb: Did you just take the idea out of a drawer or develop it especially for Frosted Games?

MC: Matthias Nagy really fills that niche of short games with a historical background, which is why I showed it to him first. But I still designed the game independently, because I like the shorter war games. WATERGATE is the first offspring of what you could call my political phase, and it contains all the elements known since the first card driven game by Mark Herman [editor's note: WE THE PEOPLE]. But it is also a deck destruction game, which becomes obvious very early on, since everyone holds only 20 cards.

sb: The game you can only play test here is "Weimar"? This is not a game that would suit Frosted Games?

MC: Exactly. "Weimar" is for four players only and usually lasts around six to six and a half hours. So its attraction to the publishing industry here in the Germanis is, of course, rather low. Hardly anyone would dare making something like that. "Weimar" will be released by Compass Games in the US, and it is a perfect fit for them.

sb: What made you switch from general to historical themes? Do you access game design from the theme and not from the mechanics?

MC: I am interested in history, I have always been. LANCASTER was created solely from the theme. Over the design process, I tried a thousand mechanics, but never changed the subject matter, until at some point the mechanics matched. I sometimes started off with the mechanics, for example in HELVETIA. But my interest in historical themes has increased due to my involvement with wargames. And much has happened in wargaming, take for example CHURCHILL (sb 2/2016) with its strong focus on political and economic aspects. These things are important to me. "Weimar" revolves 80 percent around politics and 20 percent around the military aspect.

sb: So you are not a hex-and-counter player devoted to counting movement points ...

MC: Not at all, but I am still a newbie. I like card-driven games a lot, and recently have also tried chit-pull systems.

sb: But you are basically about to change to the dark side, from the lighter fare to the more complex?

MC: As far as my personal taste is concerned, definitely. And as far as my own designs are concerned, yes, of course. If you are doing the designing job not professionally, but with passion, you simply cannot do something your heart is not really into.

sb: But now GLEN MORE II is extremely successfully on Kickstarter.

MC: That was already started three years ago, which is my usual design cycle. Only the original GLEN MORE was developed in six months ...

sb: And then you were no longer totally happy with it?

MC: Yes, from today's point of view, GLEN MORE has a few design flaws ...

sb: As the game's designer, you would blame it for flaws?

MC: Yeah, sure, I see many errors in my games, and with GLEN MORE wanted them removed. At that I could not get anywhere with KRAFTWAGEN and had simply superimposed another theme, as not unusual in the Euro gaming genre, and suddenly it worked, and Stefan Brück [editor's note: the Alea head of development] more or less snatched it from my hand.

sb: Since your name is now practically an established brand, have you considered launching your games via Kickstarter, in order to improve the monetary return?

MC: Yes, there was also the option to get involved with Funtails [editor's note: the publisher of GLEN MORE II]. But I do not want to have to deal with all the overhead – especially since I have a new, challenging job now. On the side, I just want to remain a designer.



*During Hexacon 2019:
Matthias Cramer testing "Weimar"*

*Interview for spielbox
by Matthias Hardel/cs*

Jane Austen Would Feel Honored

If you have ever wondered what it might be like to be the Lord or Lady of the Manor, this is your chance to give it a go. The game is set in Victorian England and your task is to renovate your stately home, become the most highly reputable family in the county of Derbyshire and encourage visits from Charles and Elizabeth Fairchild, rich, young siblings from Yorkshire.

The ambitious plans can be realized by clever deck building, worker placement, tile collecting, and hand management along with timely decision making. You will start by receiving four Gentry cards representing Mother, Father and the two children of your chosen family along with a small number of servants. Everyone's estate begins with an identical set of five Improvement tiles, and it is these and the Gentry cards that you will play to progress towards your objectives.

During the course of the game you will need to hold events associated with the improvements you make to your house. To these you will invite guests in the hope that they will bring you money, increase your reputation, and widen your social circle.

Before delving further into the game, perhaps it is time to take a closer look at the tiles and cards. Each Gentry card represents a potential guest and is illustrated with a portrait of the person together with their name and a brief description of their background. The card also contains icons showing the staff that they will require during their visit, their

prestige rating, their victory point value, and what bonuses they will bring to the party in the form of money, increased prestige, and/or additional guests.

Welcome if generous

A couple of random examples are: a) Lady Alexandra Suffolk, "The stunning daughter of the Marquess of Suffolk is an



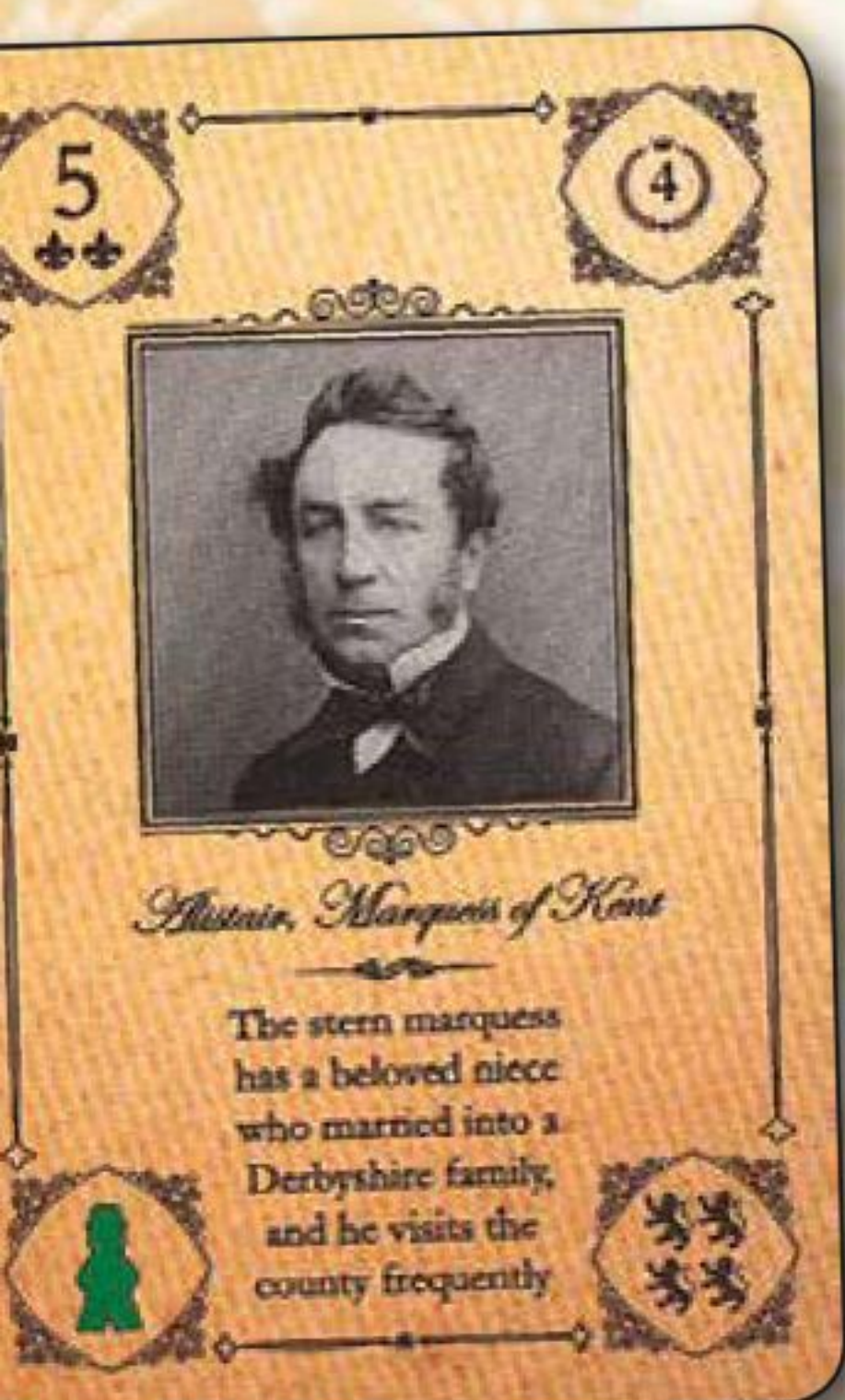
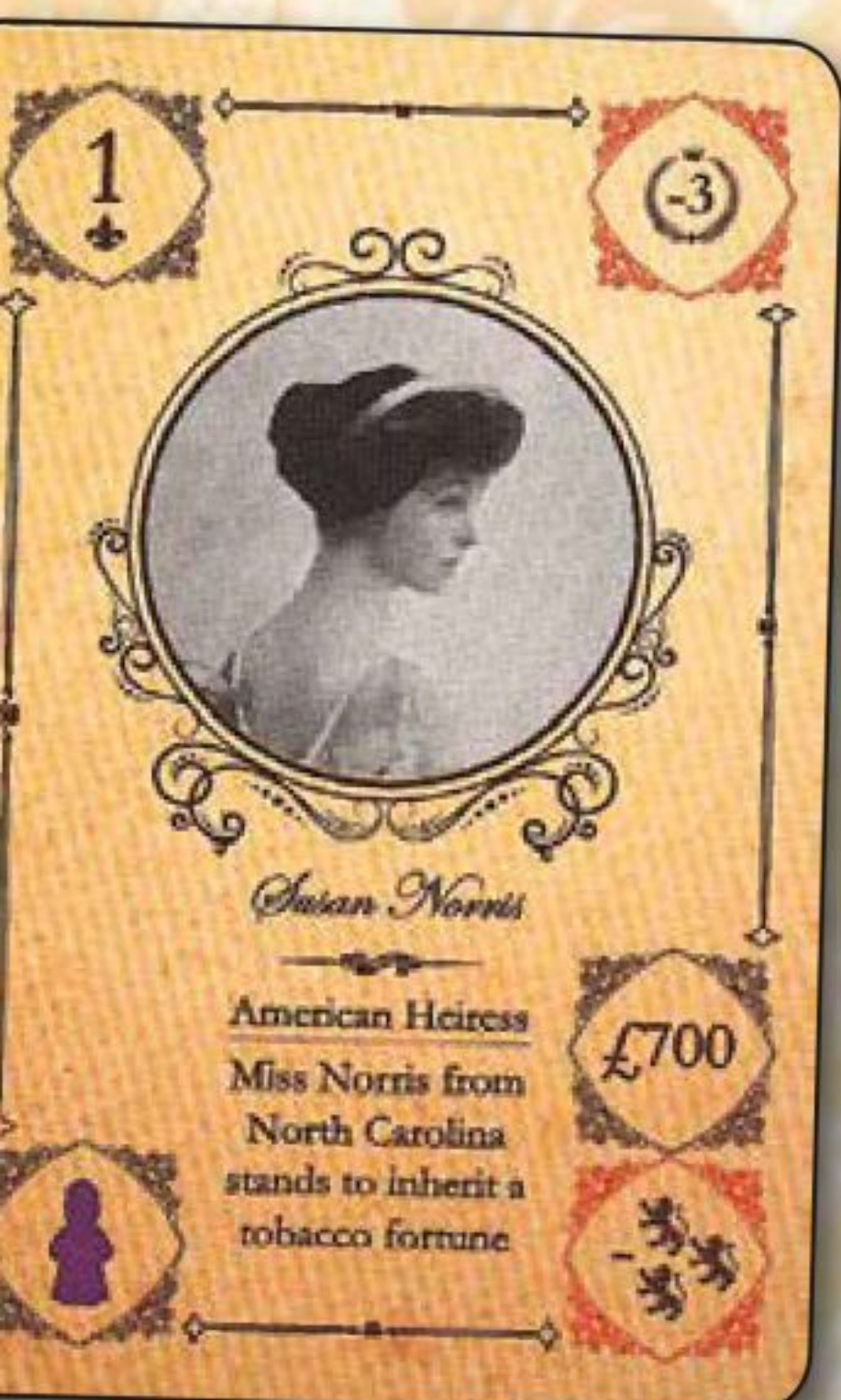
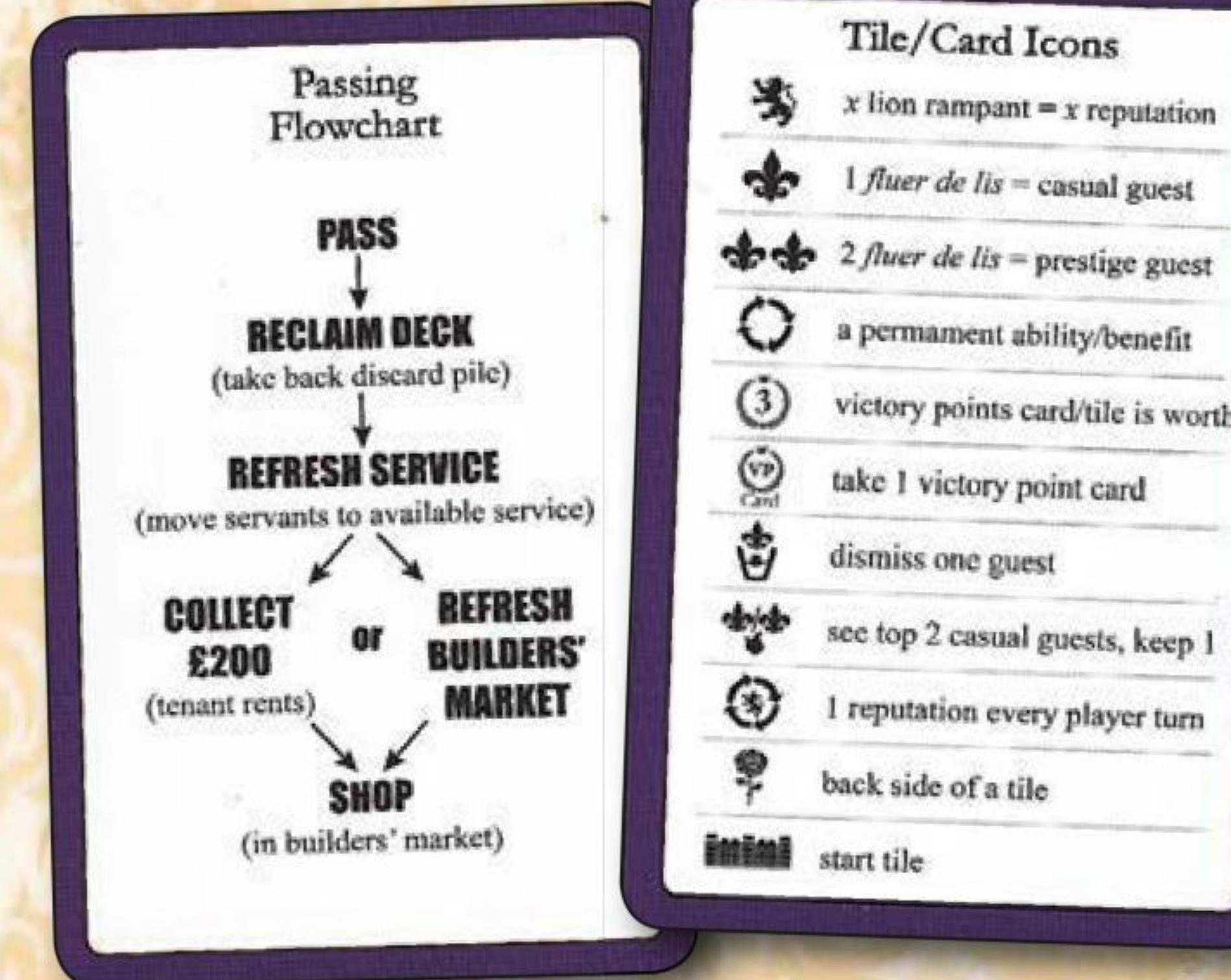
accomplished musician." With a prestige of 5, she requires a lady's maid, has a points value of 4, allows you to increase your prestige by 3 steps, and gives you another guest. And b) Sir Richard Beeston, "The well-traveled Sir Richard loves music and is known for his gallantry and hospitality." Prestige 1, requires a valet, gives just 1 VP, and brings £200 with him when he visits.

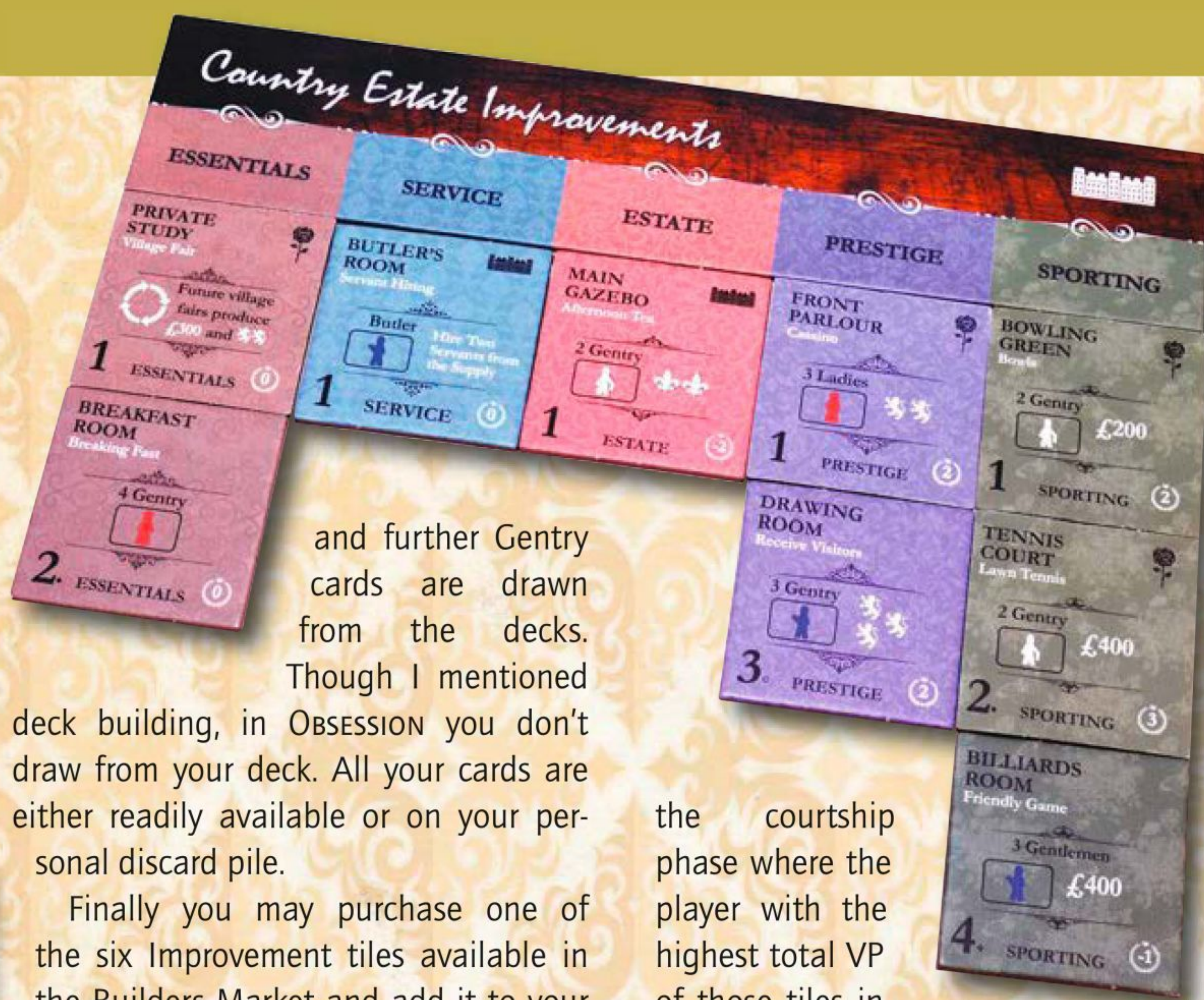
There are five groups of Improvement tiles. The groups represent Essentials, Service, Estate, Prestige, and Sporting. Each tile shows the staff and the

minimum level of prestige required to hold the event, the recurring benefit for doing so, the number and type of the guest that have to attend, and any plus or minus VPs. An example is Hillside Kennels with a prestige of 3, a final point score of 4, needs the services of a footman, allows you to invite up to 4 guests, and will give you £400. Once used, Improvement tiles will be flipped to their back side, showing different requirements as well as returns but first of all more VPs.

On your turn you may either take an action or pass. Should you decide on the former, take the following steps in sequence. First, rotate your servants. They begin the game in the Available Service area on your player board. As they are used they move to the appropriate card or tile after which they go to the Expended Service area and then to the Servants Quarters before returning to the Available Service area. It is vitally important therefore to manage your servants carefully as there is one 'dead' round during which they will be unavailable.

Next, select one of your Improvement tiles and the appropriate number of Gentry cards from your hand. This is not as simple as it might seem because your family prestige level must be equal to or greater than that shown on the tile and cards, and you must have the right servants available to move on to the tile and cards. Once this has been settled you can collect those bonuses/favors due to you. Money is taken from the general supply, reputation is recorded on your board,





and further Gentry cards are drawn from the decks.

Though I mentioned deck building, in *OBSSESSION* you don't draw from your deck. All your cards are either readily available or on your personal discard pile.

Finally you may purchase one of the six Improvement tiles available in the Builders Market and add it to your estate.

Unlike most games, should you choose to pass you can't just sit back and watch the world go by. First you will take back your discarded Gentry cards in to your hand and then move all your servants into the Available Service area. Then you must decide whether to collect £200 in the form of tenants' rent or to refresh the tiles in the Builders Market. So there are times during the game when it could be prudent to pass.

No point salad

A game is played over four seasons, each with four rounds in a standard game and five in the extended version. Seasons begin by revealing a Theme card and end with a Courtship. Each of the aforementioned Theme cards names one of the Improvement tile groups. At the conclusion of each season, we have

the courtship phase where the player with the highest total VP of those tiles in the group shown

on the Theme card revealed at the start of that season, chooses one of the Fairchild Gentry cards and retains it for the following season and can use it as any other Gentry card. At the end of the final round, players make further calculations involving their tiles and all four revealed Theme cards. This can be very important because if you have gathered a collection of the right Improvement tiles, it can result in a shed load of points.

There are also a number of opportunities to acquire an Objective card. These cards will give you a number of VPs at the end of the game as long as you have achieved the objective, which could be to collect three named Improvement tiles to gain 17 VPs.

At the conclusion of the fourth season, your final task is to add the points from your tiles, your Gentry cards, your repu-

Servant Icons

- Butler.** Provides service for prestigious activities (tiles) and at times caters to elite guests (cards).
- Housekeeper.** Provides service for dining activities (tiles) and may serve as a backup lady's maid (cards).
- Underbutler.** May perform any male service role—butter, valet, and footman at any time (tiles & cards).
- Footman.** Provides service for many outdoor activities (tiles) and may serve as a backup footman if trained (cards).
- Valet.** Provides service exclusively for male casual and prestige guests (cards).
- Lady's Maid.** Provides service exclusively for female casual and prestige guests (cards).



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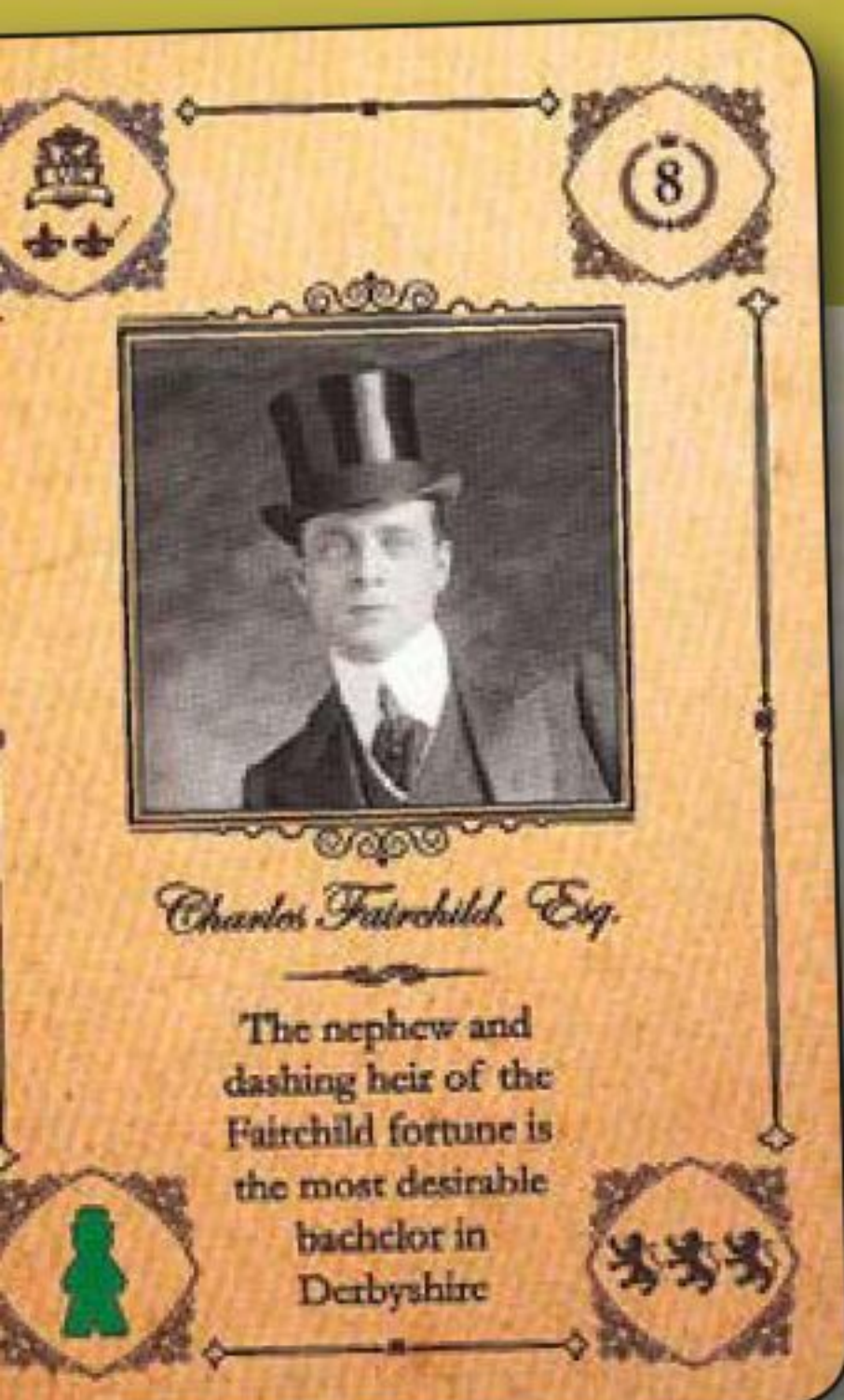
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tation, Objective cards, servants, money, and the above courtship calculation. While there are as many as seven sources of VPs, OBSESSION doesn't give the impression of a point salad, but you get the feeling that your accomplishments are honored – some, however, more than others.

Not much real interaction

OBSESSION is a game during which you will constantly be asking yourself questions. 'Is my reputation high enough?', 'Do I have the right servants available?', 'Do I have enough money to buy the Improvement tiles I need?', 'Should I try to achieve my objectives or would it be better to concentrate on acquiring courtship points?', 'Shall I organize an event or collect the benefits by passing?'. As a result you will have to keep a number of balls in the air at the same time to give yourself a chance of success.

Although the only real interaction occurs when poaching another player's reputation or stealing servants due to certain improvement tiles like Butler's Room or Servants Hall, it can be quite



rewarding to hear an opponent sigh when you purchase the very Improvement tile that they wanted.

If theme is important, then this may well be the game for you as it will not take you long to become immersed in the world of Downton Abbey. Dan Hallagan is an American



citizen who is quick to acknowledge the immense help he received from two Englishmen, experts themselves in Victorian society and etiquette, to give genuine authenticity to the theme.

At first glance, OBSESSION might appear to be a rather complicated game, but fortunately the excellent rule book is very easy to follow. It is backed up by a superb 28 page, well-illustrated glossary which explains every aspect of the game in detail and is well worth reading through before beginning to play. The 89 Gentry cards and 80 Improvement tiles allow for plenty of replayability although I cannot wait for the UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS expansion due out next year. The author has also provided the rules and additional components for an excellent solo version.

John Humphries

* Great sob stuff

I already had John's review on the table for a while and OBSESSION on my shelf when I finally tried out the game – and I got annoyed that I had waited so long. But a few months before, while skimming through the instructions, I hadn't realized where the appeal might lie, especially since nothing suggested the existence of dilemmas in decision making, let alone interaction. Sometimes you just don't see it. But then, during the first game of OBSESSION, all players were spellbound. It is great fun to plan the social activities. You are excited by every potential guest you are allowed to draw from the pile, and get an idea of the event you might want to invite the new acquaintance to. Flavor texts, as they are nowadays dutifully written on almost all cards of themed games, don't interest me at all. In OBSESSION, as short as they might be, I devoured them, and actually I felt taken back into a Jane Austen novel. Directly after this first game, one of my fellow players watched all episodes of *Downton Abbey* for the second time. OBSESSION not only plays extremely well, it has some curiosities to offer. It is, for instance, the only one of my – partially extremely complicated – games with a flowchart for the action of passing, and this makes sense, like virtually everything else. Even the reputation clock on which you rise one level after every five points needs some getting used to but is nothing you could complain about. In my opinion, the instructions could be better, especially since several important fact have been relegated to the glossary. But the latter is great – it even contains a pie chart that shows in percentages what sources the final results after 48 test games came from. It makes clear that a high reputation level, for example, is equally important as the equipment of the estate or a valuable circle of acquaintances in the deck. But in every game, you set new priorities, and it doesn't hurt to use the simple but effective solitary version for training. Sometimes, the AI of this version is more annoying than any person at the table could be. OBSESSION is a great, be it sob stuff or not.



Title: Obsession
Publisher: Kayenta Games
Designer: Dan Hallagan
Artist: Dan Hallagan
Players: 1–4
Age: about 12+ years
Duration: about 90–120 minutes
Price: about 50 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
John Humphries	8
Matthias Hardel*	9
Alan How	8

* See box.

Dice Forge: Rebellion

Only a few readers might know his name: Dirk Laureyssens, inventor and game author from Zoersel, Belgium. But it was he who was the first to realize the idea of equipping conventional dice with variable sides. The so-called Dirk's Dice were the key element in AIRPORT (Inventive Items, 1993) as well as in DIRK'S CITY GAME and ORIENT (Happy CV, 1994). And it was only in 2010 when Lego followed with a series of simple children's games with dice that could be modified in a similar fashion.

It took another seven years until this innovative idea was implemented in a more substantial way: In DICE FORGE, thanks to a plethora of tiles designed in many different ways, you can optimize your two dice by attuning them at your discretion and liquidity. So, besides the deck-building for cards as was established in DOMINION, there is now also a dice-building mechanism with a lot of similarities – the difference being, though, that dice have no memory, unlike a deck of cards (even though the deck is reshuffled after it has been fully used).

To begin with, however, the delight about this leap in quality was dampened by the suboptimally structured instructions. But the publisher complied remarkably promptly to the public's request for a revision. Since they learned from their mistakes, there is nothing to complain about the instructions of the expansion.

The expansion box comes with 20 sets of new Heroic Feat cards that can be combined with those of the basic game at the players' convenience. They allow for considerably more immediate effects; so, too, for the Moon cards, even almost exclusively. Compared to the 24 sets of the basic game, this is a strong infusion of fresh blood, which is very invigorating in itself. The gain in different dice sides, however, is limited to three each for the starting equipment and five sets of four tiles each that – as in the basic game – can be acquired through Heroic Feat cards.

Players enter completely new terrain in the two modules that shift the events partially to an oblong game board (one side used for one module, the other side for the second one) and thus open up new ways on the march to the destination, i.e., the win on points. In the first module (The

Labyrinth of the Goddess), each player moves his Golem token along the course in order to get resources, victory points, and gold. Since the dice tiles required for movement are provided by two Moon and two Sun cards, these should be acquired early on.

The "Time Golem" is particularly appreciated. He enables you to also move backwards (opposite to the normal moving direction), which can give you access to the same yields more than once. And only this makes it possible to return from the fast lane in the middle to the longer stretches at the edge. The first player to reach the end of the labyrinth receives not only a decent amount of points (which is granted to everybody who makes it that far) but also gains a divine blessing of his own choice; however, he may no longer move his Golem.

The second module (The Rebellion of the Titans) allows the players to choose in what wing of the tracks they want to move their Loyalty token. If you remain faithful to the Gods, you can expect a constant flow of gold and points; in addition, you score additional points in the end depending on the level of loyalty you have shown. But your advancement can be hampered if both of your dice show a tile that provides shards of the Ancients. This new resource (the supply of which is recorded on a track of its own) can be used in the same way as Moon shards or Sun shards, which gives you some flexibility. But if you acquire these shards, you have to move the according number of steps towards the Titans. And this helps the player who wants to side with the Titans and who therefore even upgrades his dice with more sides for shards of the Ancients. The further he gets, the bigger is the reward for each Heroic Feat card he has acquired. However, he has to retreat in time in the direction of the Gods' realm;

otherwise, he will be threatened with painful deductions of points in the end.

Naturally, the modules increase the level of complexity and consequently also the playing time, but both remain within reasonable limits. Due to the large increase of Heroic Feat cards alone, the replayability value has increased considerably, even though the number of cards



on display always remains the same. And players who were hoping for some more interaction won't be disappointed either.

Again, the game components are cast in an exemplary manner. Only some of the tokens are, again, a bit fiddly to handle, depending on their function. Given the wealth of material, it is not surprising that the price for the expansion is almost as high as the price for the basic game (which, meanwhile, has been lowered). Those players who don't yet own the basic game should definitely also get this now very abundant forge.

L. U. Dikus/sbw

DICE FORGE: REBELLION
(Libellud) by Régis Bon-
nessée; for 2–4 players,
about 10+ years; duration: about 60
minutes; price: about 30 €.





The Cradle of Chaos

Pundits believe that Western Civilization started in and around what is now called the Mediterranean Sea and, to be sure, there were a lot of civilizations and empires that flourished there: Babylon, Egypt, Carthage, Rome, et al. The latest game from GMT allows from one to six players to relive those glorious empire-building moments with **ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS OF THE INNER SEA**. The game allows expansions, trade, and competition (aka war) as well as visits by unfriendly barbarians in a card-assisted chaotic environment.

The two section, 17" by 44" mounted map of the lands surrounding the inner sea and the sea itself is split into areas. Players signify presence, settlements, or cities, by placing one, two, or three of their colored discs (called tiles) respectively, in an area.

On the map are homelands of ten civilizations, stretching from Egypt and Troy in the east to Gaul and Celt-Iberia (aka Spain) in the west, with Rome and Carthage in the middle among others. Each civilization has a special ability that helps it settle new territory or when competing with rivals. For example, a Roman player gets an additional card or two growth tiles if there is a city in or near Rome as well as some additional white (mercenary) discs to help with any competition later on in the turn; Celt-Iberia gets talents (aka money) for having tiles in or adjacent to its home area.

Civilization units are the discs mentioned above. Each civilization (not player) has 48 discs to use, with two more for victory point and game order tracks. Some scenarios allow players (when playing with fewer than six) to control multiple civilizations. Black tiles are available to represent the aforementioned barbarians and white tiles represent both mercenaries for competition and talents, the "money" of the period.

The card deck is, in a word, exquisite. The 110 cards include Ancient Wonders that civilizations can build, Event cards that must be played immediately and generally cause major problems for someone (or someones), competition cards played during conflicts between civilizations, and general cards which can add or remove tiles, cards, or money from players. There are also some cards that can negate those effects.

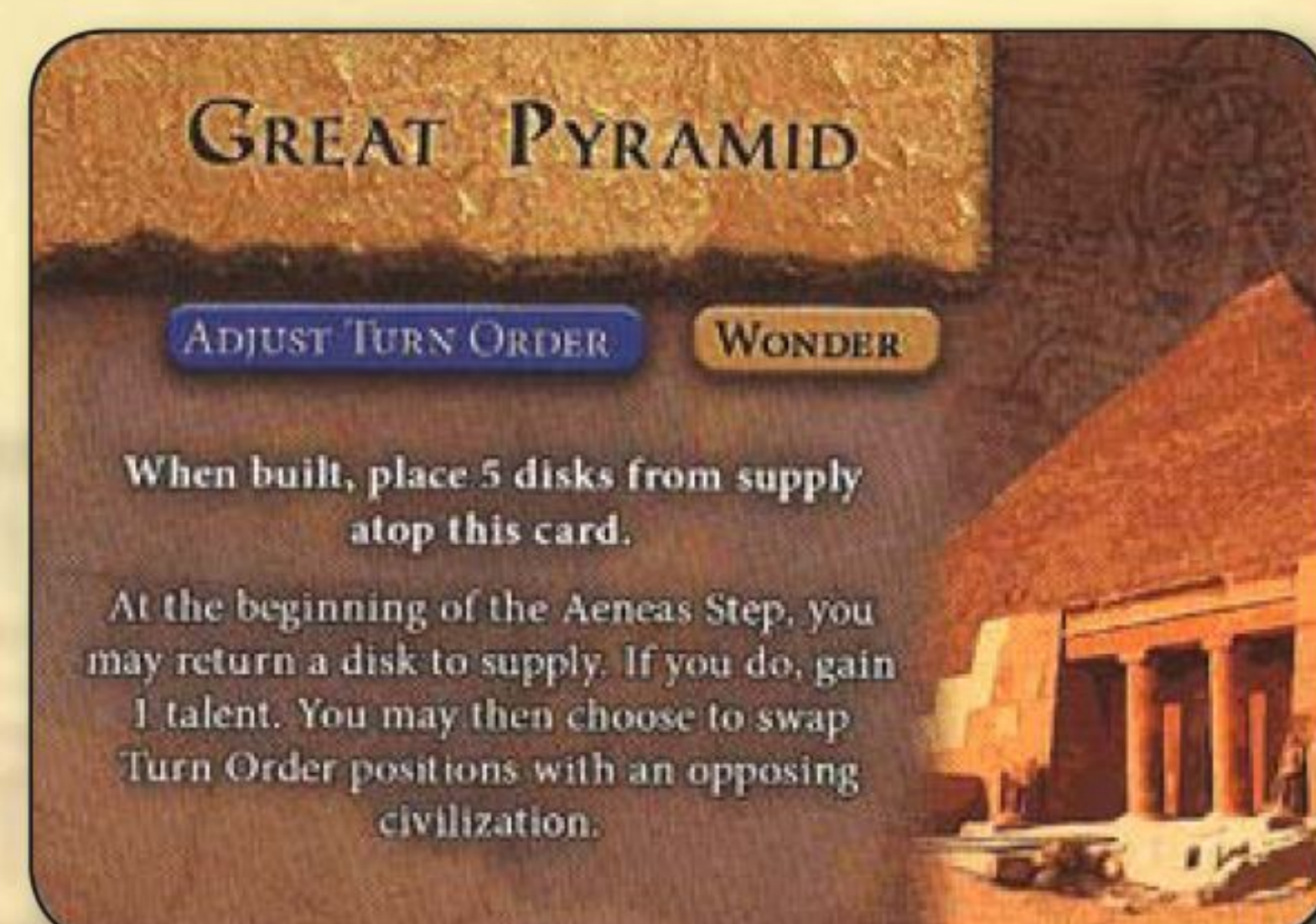
Misleading rulebook size

The 24-page rulebook is very straightforward; the size is actually misleading as ten of those pages are setup instructions. Players will have no real trouble getting into the game. There is also a 60-page Play Book, which contains historical scenarios, like Hannibal and the Fall of Rome, as well as instructions for team play and scenario crafting. The Play Book also includes rules for playing the game solitaire and some solitaire-specific scenarios – "Greeks and Persians" and "Alexander the Great" to name two. Having such rules is a nice addition for multi-player-challenged players, but it's not this game's forte.

The game consists of four epochs, each consisting of a minimum of two player turns and a maximum of four. After two player turns in each epoch, a card draw indicates continu-

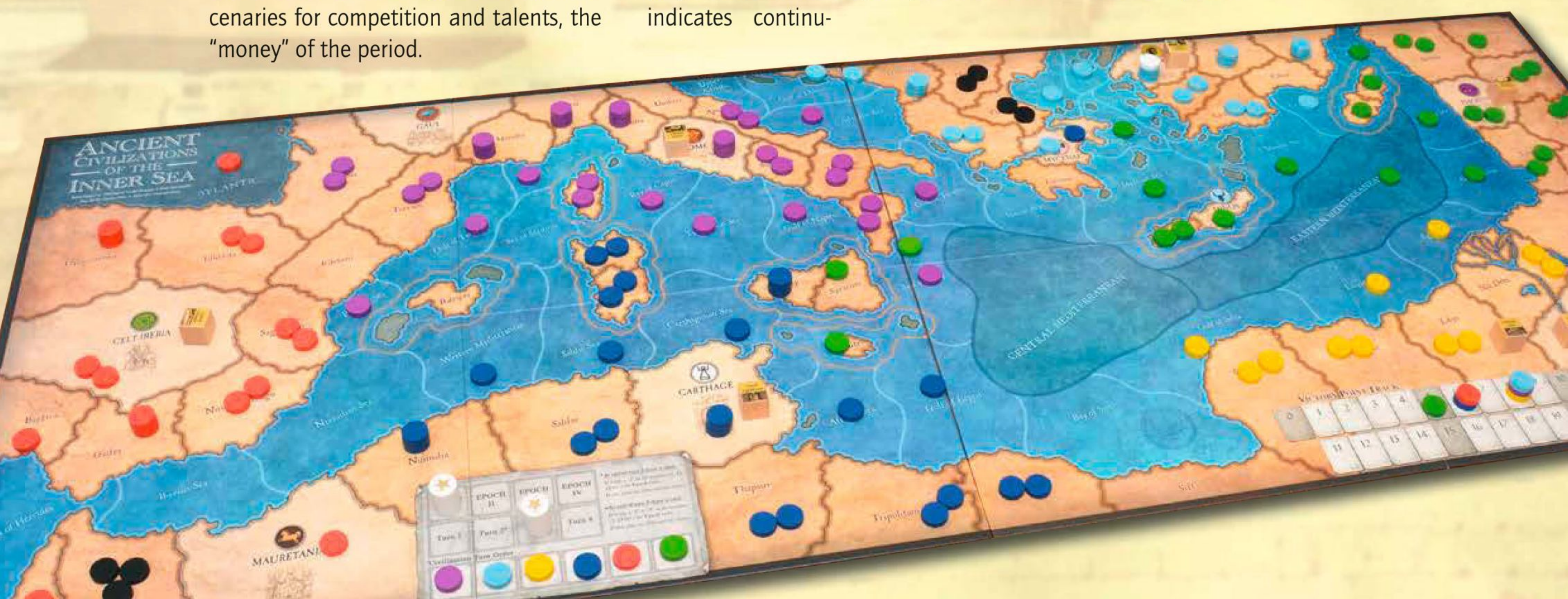
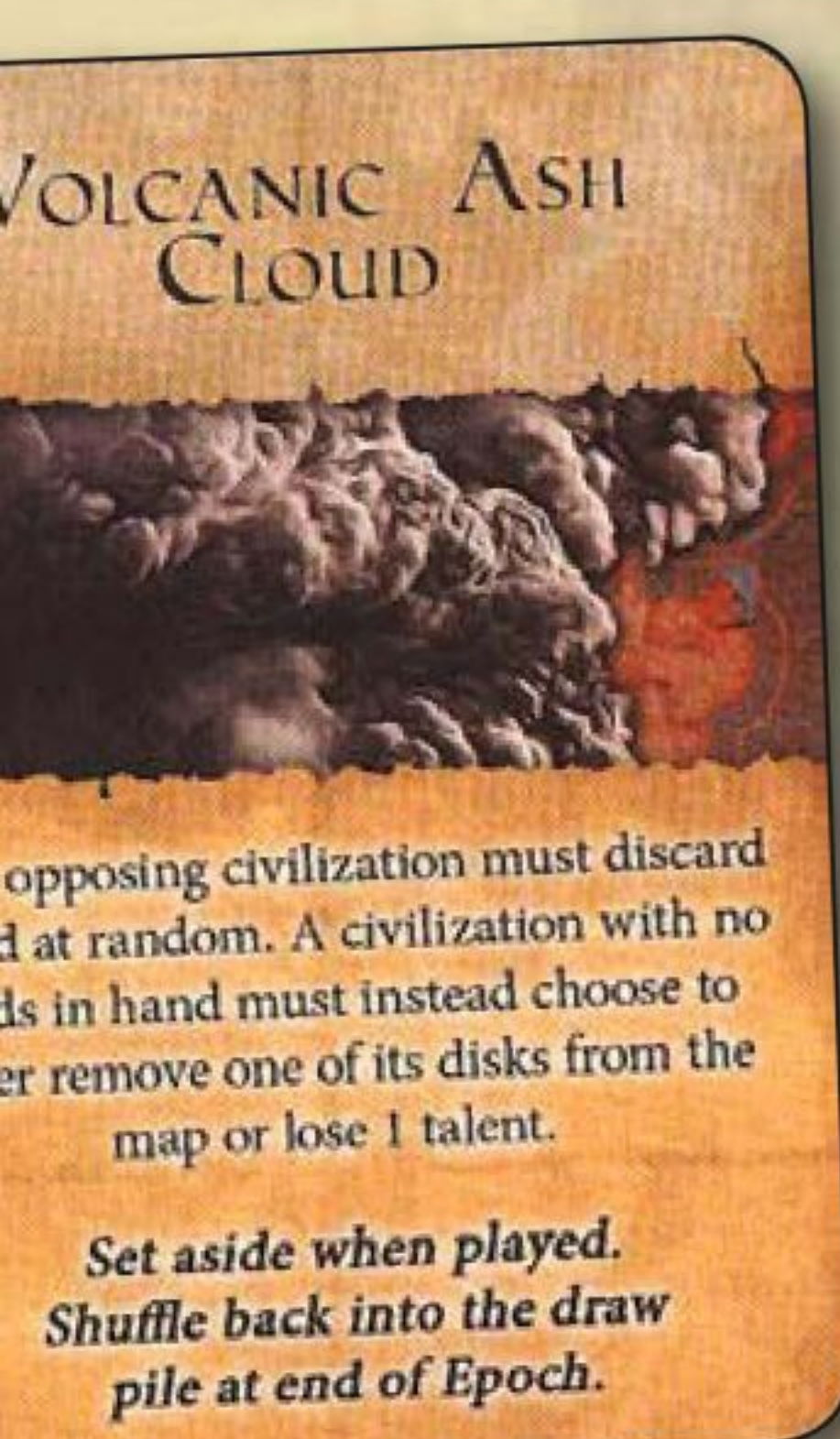
ance or an immediate end of the epoch. A game turn consists of a growth phase, card phase, and competition phase. Tiles are placed during the growth phase of a game turn and their locations modified (sometimes harshly) during the card and competition phases.

Tile placement in the growth phase is interesting: a single tile in a land or sea



area represents subsistence presence for the civilization placing it. Two tiles in a land area represents a more advanced settlement, which spurs growth; two tiles in a sea area is a declaration that "this is Mine." Three tiles in a land area represents a city – real civilization – and the fount of victory points. During the initial growth phase, a civilization gains a tile (taken from their supply) for each settlement, plus one for every two sea areas with presence or control, and one for each other civilization they have a presence adjacent to (signifying trade.) Others can be gained via Ancient Wonders built by the civilization. More on these later.

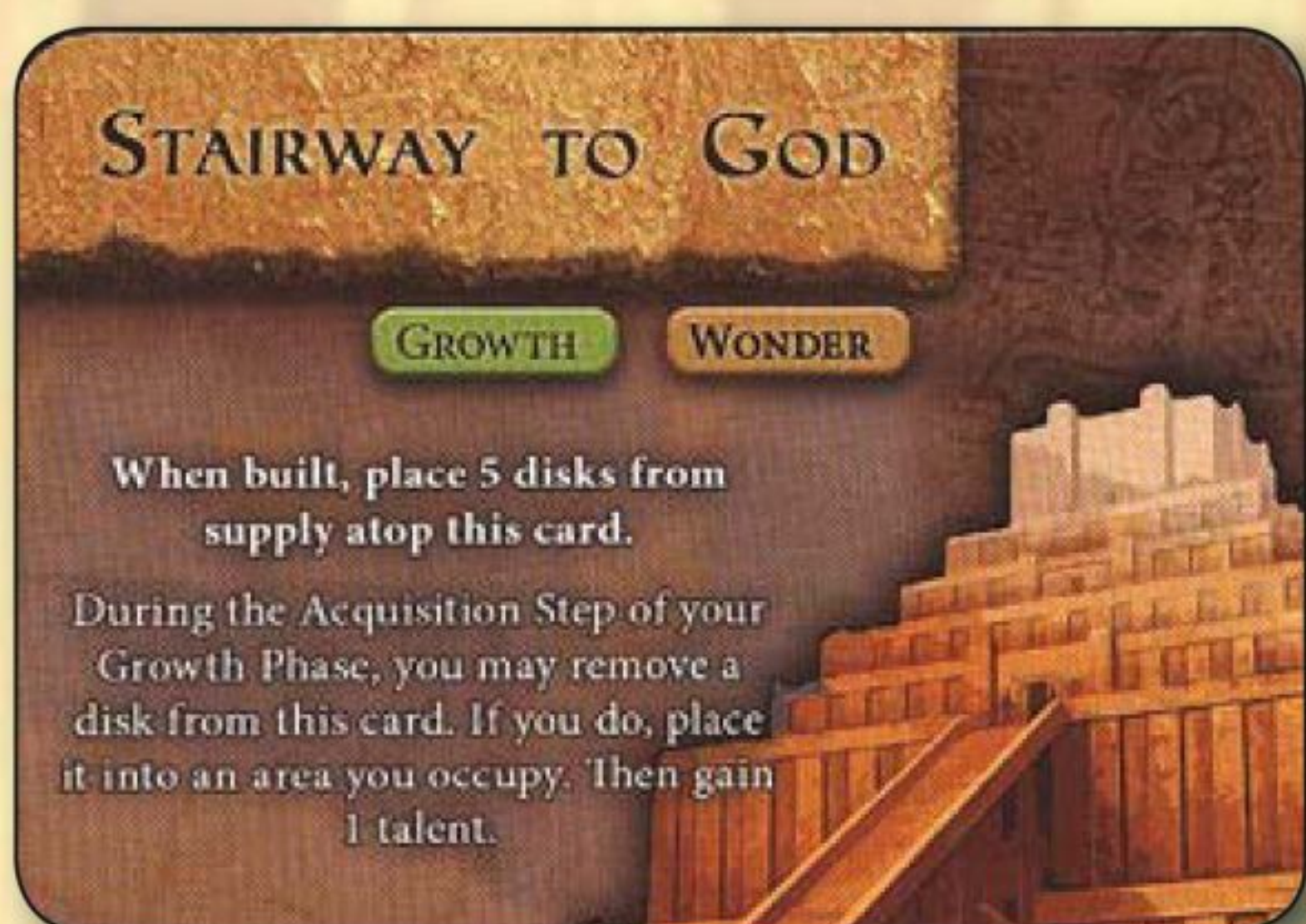
This stock of newly-collected tiles is now placed on the map spreading out into adjacent land and sea areas from areas the civilization has at least a presence. Stacking is a maximum of three in land and two at sea, with the caveat that players can stack more (up to four) in an area of poten-



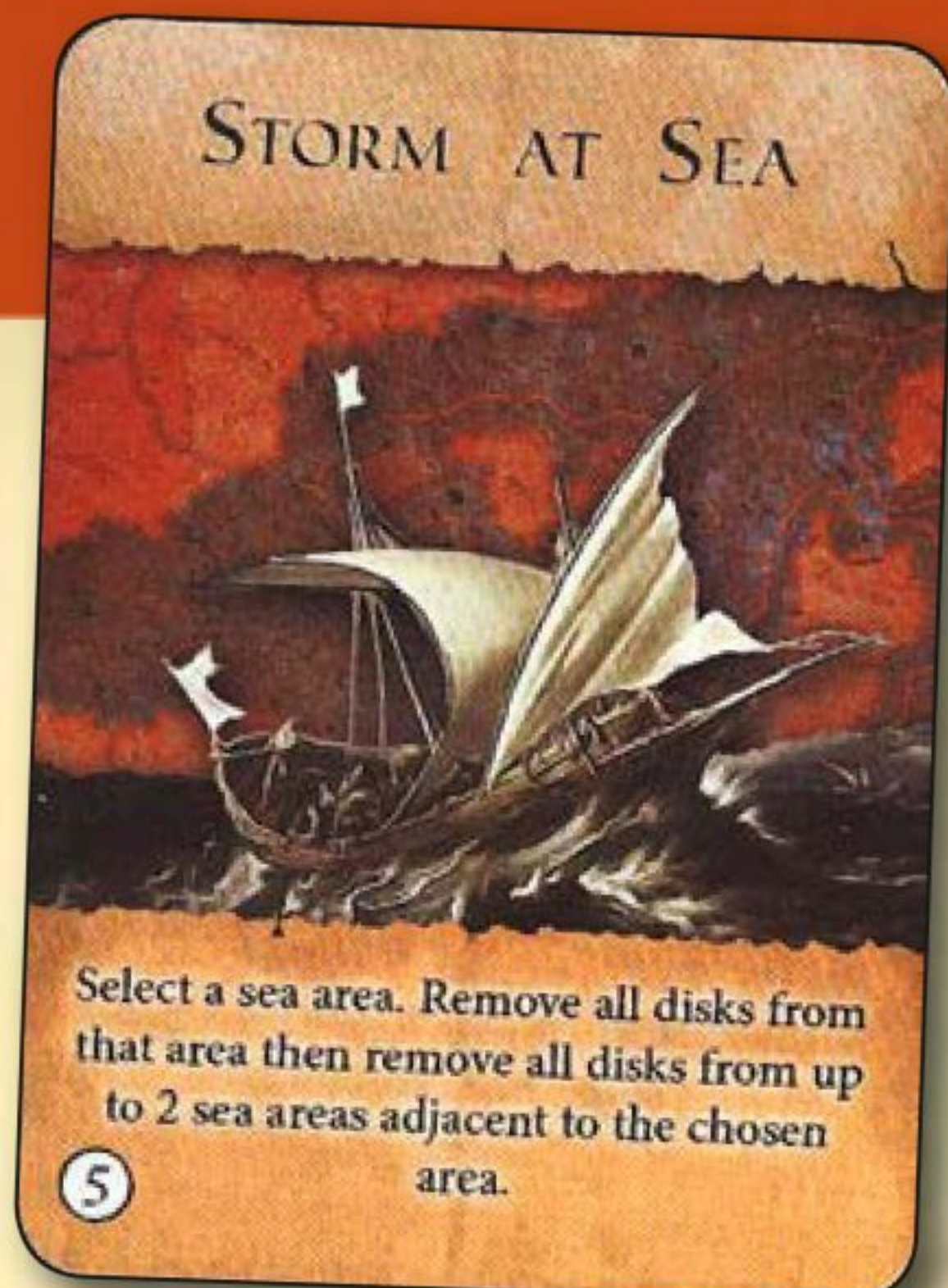


tial competition, but afterwards stacking applies and excess tiles removed. The decision to create settlements or cities, essentially the decision between growth and victory points, is a very good player conundrum and adds a lot to the game, especially early. Once other civilizations are contacted (trade) competition starts – not to mention card play – tile placement becomes more deliberate. Each civilization places all their collected tiles when their turn in the turn order arrives.

In the card phase, each player can play a card or pass, and the phase continues until everyone either runs out of cards or passes. Once the decision to pass is made, the passing civilization cannot reenter the card phase. It might pay off to slow play your hand, not using all of your cards in this phase as they might be put to good use later as well.



One initial decision early is whether to build an Ancient Wonder. In multiplayer games, this is almost always the first thing civilizations choose to do, although it doesn't have to be. Wonder building is limited to one per civilization per turn maximum. There are seven Wonders in total, each with its own special ability. Three (Great Lighthouse, Grand Gardens, and Stairway to God) affect growth, providing extra tiles and talents; two (Great Library and Mausoleum) allow extra card draws/selections; The Grand Temple affects competition by providing white tiles for competition and removing opposing tiles; and finally the Great Pyramid allows a player to change the player order of his civilization (very handy when the competition starts.) To build a Wonder, players remove at least



two tiles from the map, then "pay" for three more with cards, talents, or other tiles.

When built, Wonders will provide their ability, whatever it is, to the civilization where it's built – as long as that civilization has at least a presence in the same area. That can make that area a nice target for "bad" things to happen.

Aside from Wonder building, during the card phase, as one player noted, "Chaos ensues." There are good cards: Golden Age, which allows two tiles to be placed and gives one talent, and Gold Mine, which can place four tiles or give two talents. There are bad cards, like Nepotism or Local Plague, both of which can reduce a city to a mere presence disk. And there are ugly cards, like Bread & Circuses, which causes a player to lose one victory point for each city in their civilization unless paid for in cards or talents, and Black Death, which sees the removal of five tiles from three areas. There are cards that grant you more tiles or money, but there are more it seems that hurt – those that are played by one civilization on another. Disaster cards – earthquakes, volcanos, floods and disease – crop up and can knock a civilization back down to its roots.

I Devastated peninsula

Event cards, which generally bring in Barbarians from north, south or east, must be played immediately when drawn, can affect everyone or be targeted – and in an effort to level the civilized playing field, the player with the fewest victory points controls where those barbarians crop up. Take the nastiest Event card for example – the Sea People. The controlling player places four black tiles in a sea area, then four black tiles in every land area that borders that area.

Consider the following example: Rome has a cluster of five cities and two Wonders and is comfortably leading in victory points. In one card phase she's hit with one volcano, an earthquake, and an unfriendly visit from the Sea People. Not only was Rome sacked, but the entire Italian peninsula was devastated!

Some of the cards, like the Biblical Flood, are designated to appear once

CGE
Czech Games Edition

There's
hell to play



ONDRA SKOUPÝ

Letter Jam



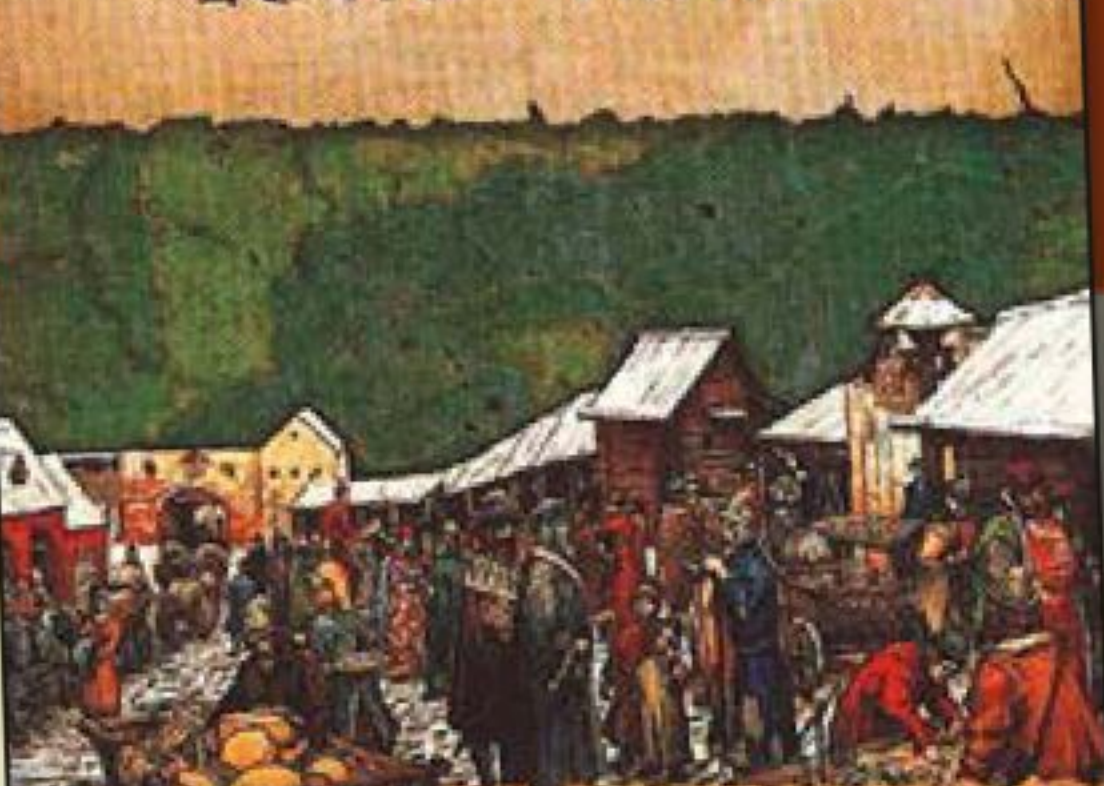
A COOPERATIVE WORD GAME



NEW LEADERS AND WONDERS



The expansion for a classic



Gain 1 talent.

Then select 2 adjacent land areas that each contain a disk of a color of your choice. Add 1 disk of that color to each of those areas.

16



each Epoch, which means being set aside until the Epoch changes, then reinserted into the draw deck. Others are shuffled back in as soon as they are played.

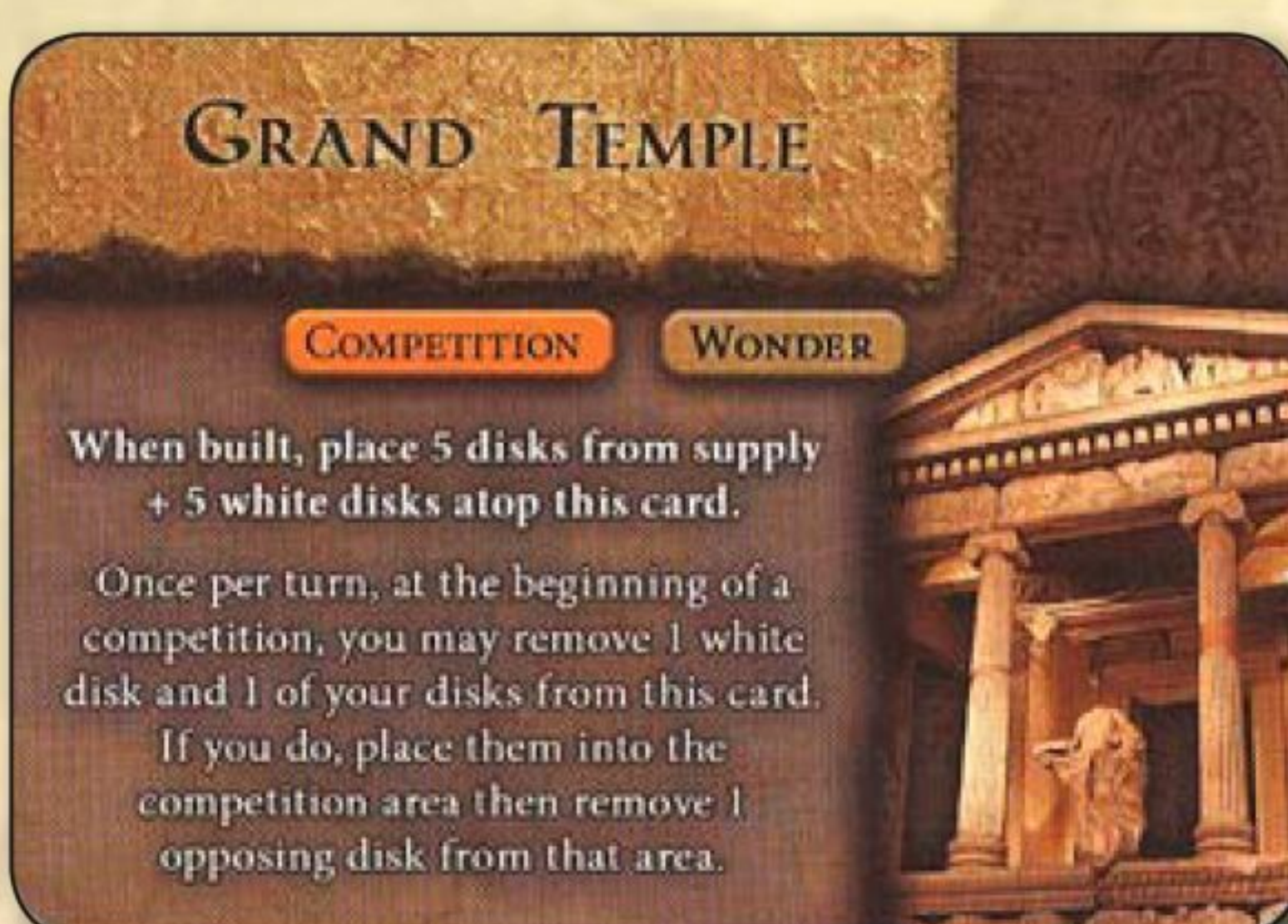
As noted: Chaos. For some, too much, as "planning" a civilization is almost pointless, especially in a multiplayer game. Chaos can lessen with fewer players but not much. Your taste on the level of chaos may vary.

When all the cards have been played or when all players pass, the map is checked for competition. Basically, any co-habited area where at least one civilization has two or more tiles becomes a competition area. Competition is a diceless procedure. The competing parties simultaneously (if equal in the number of tiles) or sequentially (if unequal) remove tiles until only one civilization remains. Pretty straightforward, but a bit more confusing in practice.

For one, wonders or competition cards can have an effect, as do some civilization special abilities. Competing near Carthage, for example, brings Carthaginian white tiles into play. If, say, Rome is competing with Carthage and they both have three tiles in the area, Carthage can add one white tile, giving them the numerical advantage, as well as an additional tile to remove. For another, players can "pay" rather than remove a tile. Paying a talent or discarding a card in lieu of a tile is an option if you have the cards/talents to give. It can be confusing at first, but it works pretty well. One thing players will have to determine when faced with multiple competitions is when to fight and when to give in. If you "win" a competition and destroy an

enemy city (a stack of three or more tiles), you gain a talent and a victory point.

As noted, Epochs can last two to four turns. When the Epoch ends, more victory points for majorities in Cities and Wonders are scored, and points are awarded for sea areas and treasury, then everyone loses their treasury and all cards in their hand. A card is drawn and the card number is used on the Change of Epoch Table, which can generate Black Death (removal of tiles near sea zones), Urban Decay (civilization with most cities loses one victory point per every two cities), Vibrant Economies (civilizations gain one



GRAND TEMPLE

COMPETITION WONDER

When built, place 5 disks from supply + 5 white disks atop this card.

Once per turn, at the beginning of a competition, you may remove 1 white disk and 1 of your disks from this card. If you do, place them into the competition area then remove 1 opposing disk from that area.

talent for every two cities it has) or Currency Debasement (civilizations start next turn with fewer or more cards based on highest to lowest victory points.) In other words, another dose of chaos. At the end of the game the player with the most victory points wins.

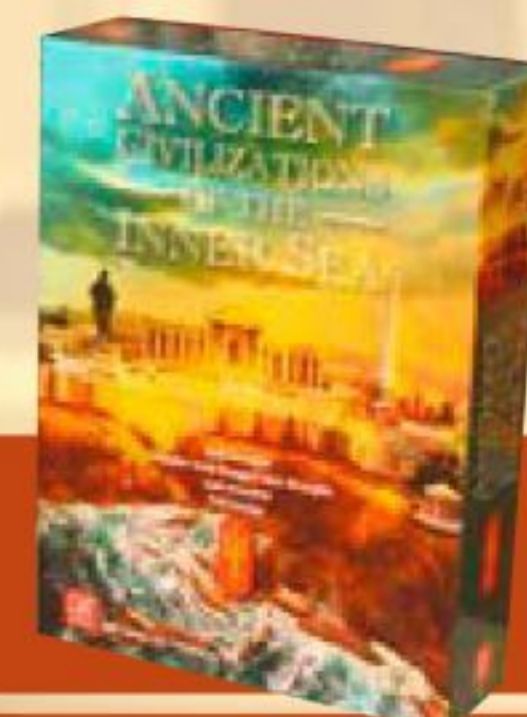
Constrained by the cards you get

Played with fewer than six tends to subdue the chaos a little, as event cards show up less often. But players are still constrained by the cards they get. Get a lot of competition cards (as Troy did in a recent game) while Egypt gets a lot of growth or hurt-the-other-civilization cards, you'll see a large disparity between civilizations. However, the roles can quickly reverse, especially when an Event occurs and

you're behind in victory points. Payback anyone? It is fun.

Overall, this is not a game for strategists; it's a game to play for the sheer "joy" of Fate. We've seen games with a victory point leader get taken down by the last change of Epoch card (very demoralizing); we've seen civilizations (like the Roman one mentioned above) knocked down to almost no presence, and build back up, while everyone else focused on other, larger civilizations. Play with fewer players is faster as there are fewer decisions (and fewer opponents to mess with). With more players, there are more decisions to be made – which civilization do you target? When should you use that rare "negate" card? Decisions on growth are equally important – where is the competition expected? Do you maximize growth or victory points? The latter can be detrimental when the civilization with the fewest victory points gets control of the barbarians. Rate this one an 8 for fun chaos-loving groups and 5 for those preferring a more deliberate strategic approach to empire building.

John D. Burt



Title: Ancient Civilizations of the Inner Sea
 Publisher: GMT
 Designer: Mark McLaughlin, Chris Vorder Bruegge
 Artist: Blackwell Hird, Kurt Miller, Chechu Nieto
 Players: 1-6
 Age: about 12+ years
 Duration: about 3-5 hours
 Price: about 79 €

Reviewer John D. Burt. 5/8
 Matthias Hardel* 4

* Neatly done, with some interesting mechanisms and nice features of the wonders and civilizations. But unfortunately – especially with many players – a completely arbitrary and, in particular, extremely luck-dependent tooth-and-nail battle. Cumbersome as a solitary game, dispensable with two players.

EGYPT

GIFT OF THE NILE

DURING THE ACQUISITION STEP OF YOUR GROWTH PHASE:
 If an Egyptian disk occupies an area containing the depiction of the Nile River (Egypt, Nile Delta or Kush), transfer 1 disk from supply to the Ready box.
 If an Egyptian City occupies a Nile River area, transfer an additional disk and gain 1 talent.

Civilization Display



READY

Unless specifically allowed by card play, Egypt cannot place disks in either deep sea area (Central or Eastern Mediterranean) until Epoch IV.

TREASURY

- Pay 1 talent to prevent the loss of a disk.
 - Pay 1 talent to buy 1 card during the Draw Step.
 - Pay 2 talents to buy 1 card during the Draw Step.

LOOT

Can't spend talents here.



Bee present

Bear in mind



Moving Round and Round on the Board

Despite its title, **POLE POSITION** (Parker) did not start out on position 1 of the board game adaptations of computer games. Originally developed as a so-called Arcade game, it was first ported to various Atari systems, the Vectrex gaming console, and the then much-loved home computer C64. And although it made its way onto the game board as early as in 1983, **FROGGER** (1981), **PAC-MAN** and **DONKEY KONG** (both 1982) preempted it.

At least, **POLE POSITION** managed to just outmaneuver the overwhelming competition from Milton Bradley on the BGG ranking – to be honest, limited to an age restriction of 7 to 14 years. But in contrast to **FROGGER** and **DONKEY KONG**, there is no author listed. That is a pity since the (obviously in-house) developers actually came up with a few nice ideas; and in terms of the material and the mechanisms, these ideas were implemented quite reasonably.

The board shows the usual curvy circular course from an aerial perspective. What's special is that – with the exception of the starting and finish areas – drivers can switch one of the other four straights sideward by one track. This procedure is not particularly close to reality, but an effective method of forcing the competition to slam on the brakes if you have positioned your own car in a curve on the remaining track. Or also by placing one of the two freely available rookie drivers in a black car right before a curve.

Each player gets a set of six cards in the color of the race car randomly assigned to him. The cards indicate the moving range of your car and allow you to switch tracks and to place interference cars. The total of movement points depends on the starting position and the order of play resulting from this; the order remains unchanged for the entire race.

Since the racing line for the red car is 60 spaces, Red, with a "tank capacity" of 18 points, has to refuel at least three times. Blue's route is two spaces longer; but since he has three points more in his tank, he could, theoretically, make



do with only two tank refills – though, because of unavoidable hindrances, this almost never happens. For the same reason, being in pole position does not necessarily mean half the battle for the win – unlike in the well-appreciated (at the time) C64 version; there, players first needed to qualify for the pole position, which spared them accident-prone passing maneuvers later on.

You can't freely react to impairments by playing the remaining cards. In fact, you have to preset the playing sequence

of the cards; and even cards with two instructions don't give you a possibility to choose. As far as I know, a chain of actions programmed in such a way had never existed before in a board game for the mass market; this mechanism had been limited to conflict simulations or also to the pub-brawl game **SWASHBUCKLER** (Yaquinto, 1980), where all players note down the next six steps of their figure before these steps are executed in turn.

Such programming led to the same slapstick stunts as those that became something special in the 1990s in **DROIDS**, by Dominique Ehrhard, and **ROBO RALLY**, by Richard Garfield, and, more recently, also have guaranteed outbursts of amusement in Christophe Raimbault's **COLT EXPRESS**. Even though this cannot be fully attributed to **POLE POSITION**, the unexpected blocking of moves probably were quite funny for the target group back then.

In keeping with the receptiveness of that group, the instructions are so short that they fit on the inlay on the inside bottom of the box and even left enough space for two graphics.

Unlike in many other games, the vehicles are not little model cars but flat, racy-looking silhouettes made of hard plastic. It is remarkable that, even after such a long time, the foam stickers still serve the purpose of stabilizing the edges of the switchable

straights. But this makes it impossible to fold the game board completely, so that the lid of the box can be pressed shut only by putting the weight of another game box on top.

The original version, awarded as the "Arcade Game of the Year," was the first digital game with integrated advertising. So it kind of suggested itself to include some poster advertising on the playing area of the analog version as well, next to the race track – ads for **MONOPOLY** and **RISK**.

L. U. Dikus/sbw

Go Gecko Go!

The title is slightly misleading: Go Gecko Go suggests that players only have to get a small lizard across the finishing line. But Jürgen Adams also sends other beasts on his river trip. Crocodile, turtle, frog and yes, a gecko – four wooden animal blocks of various sizes and colors have to be transported across the water to a tree trunk.

The swimming competition is regulated by weather and color dice, granting movement to specific colors, allowing individual animals to catch up or all of them to jump into the sun.

The exciting bit are the river rules: All animals can jump over and land on the backs of each other, or let movements lapse entirely. But while the big ones take

the small ones along with them for a ride, the heavyweights are blocking everyone that is lighter beneath them. The gecko likes to travel piggyback on the crocodile, but clearly this does not work the other way. Twice on their journey, the swimmers have to duck under low bridges. This is when the animals at the bottom get to throw off their extra baggage.

Go Gecko Go, nominated for the Children's Game of the Year 2019 in Germany, is a beautiful introduction to tactical thinking: Should I block a small animal or let my move lapse? Is it worth mounting as a free rider right ahead of a bridge? Do I let an animal fall behind or should I keep them all close together? While you probably would not want to swim in this river, playing in it is just fine.

Katrin Reil/cs



Go Gecko Go! (Zoch) by Jürgen Adams; for 2–4 children, about 6+ years; duration: about 20 minutes; price: about 30 €.

Monsieur Carrousel

When Monsieur Carrousel tempts people to a ride, crowds of children are never far away – the large, wooden carousel is just too impressive, and the design steeped in cotton candy colors hard to resist. The game is an eye-catcher, for sure. But what about gameplay? A whole dozen children want to get a seat in MONSIEUR CARROUSEL. For this to work, everybody has to be careful and help the others. The player in turn rolls the die and places a children's tile of their choice on one of the matching color spaces. Then the merry-go-round takes a spin. Depending on whether the newly boarded child comes to a standstill in the rain or in the sun zone, the weather will be changing. If color spaces are no longer available, players have to cooperate and guess the hidden ride-animal under the child Monsieur Carrousel is currently pointing at. Raindrops or sunbeams are handed out here.

As soon as everyone has found a seat, they can enjoy some fun. But if all the

rain spaces are filled, Monsieur Carrousel is forced to stop the ride and the game is lost. Fortunately, the sunbeams can drive away the rain. Theme, design, materials and mechanism make this fairground visit a great pleasure for preschoolers. However, with full player counts the wait for the next ride is just a bit too long. And take care not to turn the merry-go-

round too wildly, or accidents are guaranteed.

Katrin Reil/cs

MONSIEUR CARROUSEL (Loki) by Sara Zarian; for 1–6 children, about 4+ years; duration: about 15 minutes; price: about 30 €.





When the Leaves Are Starting to Fall ...

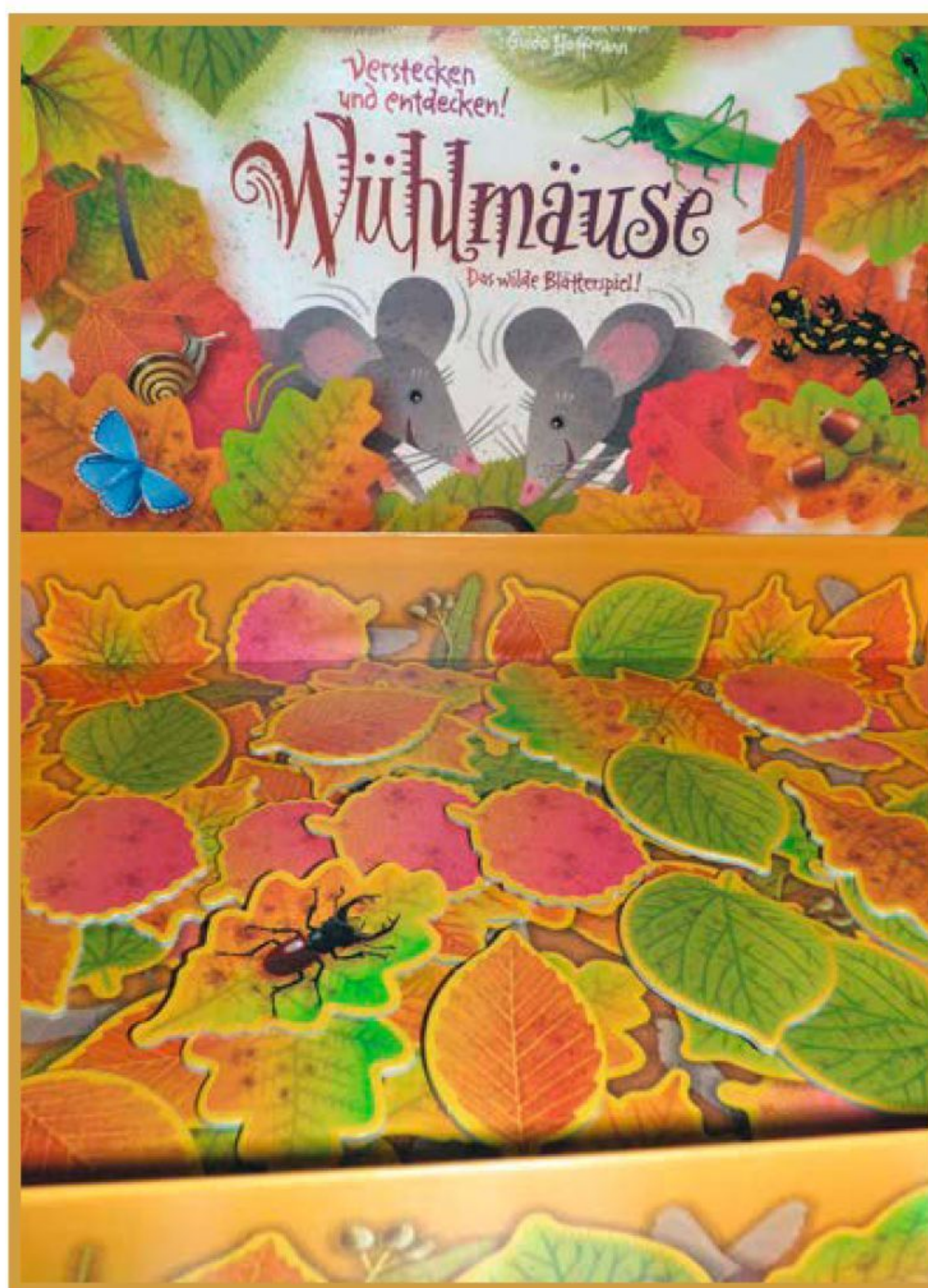
Fall has also arrived in the playroom, and leaves are dropping into box bottoms, with voles, dormice or a squirrel's nut stock all hidden under the foliage. The basic idea of things hidden in and underneath a pile of leaves is identical in all of the following games, while they still manage to set different tones.

Wühlmäuse

In WÜHLMÄUSE (voles), children of around five years and up can rummage around in the rather realistically looking autumnal foliage. Johann Rüttinger and Paul Kappler have designed the interior of their box like a woodland floor, with a variety of oak, maple, lime and beech leaves. These are very colorful, but still life-like enough to almost make you feel you can smell them and the surrounding soil. In addition, the box contains 12 "real" leaves of sturdy cardboard, to form small foliage piles.

At the start of the game, the children are allowed to dig around, as they take turns to search for new leaves, which they hide under the existing ones. The special thing about these ingredients is that among them are animals or fruits of the forest, also very realistically drawn by the design team from Drei Hasen in der Abendsonne. If an animal is hidden, with the searching children not knowing which motive exactly,

everyone starts searching for the new forest dweller, using just one hand. Many little fingers are rummaging around in the box until one child has found the new item, shows it to the others and then has to name it. For younger children, generic terms such as beetle or butterfly are suffi-



cient, but schoolchildren are expected to know the precise names. Parents or educators should therefore take some time before the game to explain all the kinds of leaves to the kids. The extensive rules do not only mention the names, but also some information about the animals and fruits, which additionally helps players to memorize the pictures.

Getting down to business, children not only have to remember the explanations; they should also have memorized which pictures they have already seen. Because every leaf they find remains in the box, the heap continues to grow. The reward is a gold coin for every correct find. And the player with the most coins wins.

If all types are used, the game can drag on quite a bit. At least initially, groups should try and play with a somewhat more manageable amount of leaves, say only the 17 animal pictures. This approach also helps with memorizing the many new animal names, as most five-year-olds are unlikely to be familiar with the swallow-tail caterpillar or the fire bug.

Rummaging and memorizing combined in a near-natural game is an exquisite mix that provides a great challenge for kindergarten and preschool kids. WÜHLMÄUSE entices them on a subsequent nature walk, to turn over stones and leaves and to make real discoveries in an autumn forest, so that everyone can smell the forest floor for real.

WÜHLMÄUSE (Drei Hasen in der Abendsonne) by Jens-Peter Schlie-mann and Guido Hoffmann; for 2–5 children, about 5+ years; duration: about 20–30 minutes; price: about 28 €.

Marienkäfer oder Siebenschläfer

In MARIENKÄFER ODER SIEBENSCHLÄFER (ladybug or dormouse), the box does not turn into a digging, but instead into a shaking tool. Again, it provides many leaves as hiding material in an almost cubic cardboard box, but here the animals are not drawn underneath the leaves: They are depicted as cut-out drawings on round cardboard chips. The detailed images make it difficult to recognize them, and the foliage cover makes

this even more so. Which means in this game it is equally important that players get to grips with the motifs before the start.

Designer Teubner suggests "first discovery" as an opening game, where the children hand out all the animals, also available as large cards, among them. In turn order, the round cardboard chips with the animal cut-outs are then revealed, named and placed on the matching ani-

mals. After this preparation, nine of the animal chips are placed inside the closed box together with the leaves and shaken vigorously. After the box is opened again, everyone looks at the forest floor inside and tries to memorize the colored parts and body shapes that are visible among the leaves.

Only then the children flip over three of the large animal cards. If someone thinks they have recognized one of them inside



the box, they take the animal card. If they do not recognize anything, they are allowed to shake the box again and look inside together, or to reveal another card.

As soon as five of the nine animals are found, the shaking and guessing is over. The children then check together whether the assumed animals are really in the box or whether the dormouse turns out to be

a wolf after all, because these two animals are very similar in color. The player who guessed correctly gets the animal chip. A second and third round follow, until the winner of the observation contest is determined.

Teubner's basic idea – to make the cut-out element of the animal search even more difficult with the leave cover – works

well. However, it would help the children somewhat if the chips were printed on both sides. In any case, precise observation is encouraged. In contrast to WÜHLMÄUSE, this game lacks the near-natural design approach. Katrin Wiehle prefers rather abstract leaf shapes and very simple animal drawings suitable for children.

Parents search in vain for more detailed information about the fauna. On the other hand, is MARIENKÄFER ODER SIEBENSCHLÄFER a very natural product that does without plastic parts such as shrink wrap or zip bags, and uses vegetable-based inks without mineral oil. And the cardboard itself is recycled. Teubner's idea is convincing and stirs the interest even of smaller children.

MARIENKÄFER ODER SIEBENSCHLÄFER (Beltz & Gelberg) by Marco Teubner; for 2–4 children, about 4+ years; duration: about 20–30 minutes; price: about 20 €.

Nuss voraus!

When it comes to the components, Nuss VORAU (nut ahead) is the exact opposite of the former game. This foil-wrapped Ravensburger game with its thermo-

formed insert houses a large plastic squirrel, which is going on a search for 13 magnetic plastic hazelnuts. With regard to theme and gameplay, however, Haferkamp likewise focuses on the leafy forest floor and the memory of the young players.

At the beginning, the children put the magnetic nut discs into the plastic recesses of the board and try to remember as many of the hiding places as possible under the 24 leaf spaces. Then Herbert, the large plastic squirrel, is moved through the leafy forest by die roll. Once he reaches a target, a button on his head is pressed, whereupon Herbert makes a scratchy noise, followed either by a sigh or an enthusiastic "ja-ha" (yes). In the latter case, the child steering Herbert gains the hazelnut

under the leaf. If golden, it comes with a Super Nut marker that counts like an additional nut but can be lost again. Only the player who discovers the last of the three golden hazelnuts keeps this additional marker. The search ends as soon as a child has collected four nuts.

Haferkamp also provides a variant testing the quick reaction skills of the five-year-olds, where they try and grab the golden nut. All in all, Nuss VORAU is a simple memory game that could actually do without the electronic gadgets. A magnet under the squirrel would have been sufficient for the bushy animal to lift the leaf. As it is, the magnetic forces are only triggering the voice programming, and Herbert cannot lift anything. On the plus side, Ravensburger supplies the required button cells, for these are certainly not a standard item in every family household.

Wieland Herold/cs



NUSS VORAU! (Ravensburger) by Kai Haferkamp; for 2–4 children, about 4+ Jahren; Spieldauer: 15–20 minutes; price: about 40 €.

Mandala

For decades, colorfully printed dish-towels were a hallmark of Ragnar Brothers (HISTORY OF THE WORLD, BACKPACKS & BLISTERS, and many more). Only rarely did this kind of game mat appear elsewhere; but just recently, it has come up in MANDALA (Lookout).

The oblong cloth shows two large circles. On your turn, you place one of the

has to be added there to the others of the same color.

Once all six colors appear in a Mandala, players claim the cards in the center of the image: The player with the majority of cards on the edge of this field is the first to choose; he may take all cards of one color. In most cases, this will be the biggest pile; additionally, he might be entitled to pick a color one additional time over his opponent. All cards on the Mandala side facing the player are only relevant for the determination of the majority and are removed after the claiming procedure.

Wherever you capture cards, you place them on your own "river" or "cup." In the end, only those on the cup score victory points. The value of each card, however, is determined by the river. This is where you place the cards from left to right, starting with the first captured

he will be interested in capturing these very colors as late as possible, since this alone would give him five plus six points.

Mandalas are often associated with relaxation – or boredom. The latter certainly won't come up here; but to begin with, everything seems relaxed. Since the two starting cards determine the initial way to go, it is easy to get into the game. The rules are simple; the instructions could have been even shorter, though. The possible action "Discard and draw" is almost always superfluous: If you place a card in a center, you may then draw three cards; and that is enough for a constant fresh supply of hand cards. MANDALA beginners should keep an eye on when there is currently an uneven or an even number of colors in a center. If you are not likely to have the majority at the edge somewhere, you'll prefer an even number so that you can claim cards as many times as your opponent. Advanced players often try to first secure a majority by playing many cards; after that, they put one card after another in their desired color in the center they're aiming at – that's because they want to convert a color pile as thick as possible into victory points with their first claim.

It is a good thing to have the sixth card color in your hand, i.e., the color that completes the Mandala. In situations where both players are missing the one color that finalizes an image, this might take some time. But this is not a disadvantage



square cards in the center of one of the Mandala circles or one or more cards of the same color at the edge of your field. Depending on whether a card color is already represented in the middle or at the edge of a circle, any additional card of that color

card of a color, the "1." Any remaining captured cards of the color would be placed in the cup. This way, the colors are assigned a value of one to six points over the course of the game. Since each player begins with two cards on the cup,

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6 stand for mediocre games, and games with ratings of 7, 8, 9 can be regarded as good. The rating of 10 is reserved for exceptionally good games, and is to be seen rarely. The average

rating of the reviewed games in spielbox is well above the to be expected value of 5.5 since we focus on recommending games and disregard really poor ones for review purposes.

at all; in this case, larger quantities of cards can be built up, thereby making the situation particularly suspenseful.

The nice-looking cloth structures the playing area; but in a pinch, the game would also work without it. Basically, MANDALA consists of no more than six different card types, each of them existing 18 times. I find it very impressive that this – along with the knack of working on two

Mandalas at the same time – can provide so much depth of play.

Harald Schrapers/sbw

MANDALA (Lookout) by Trevor Benjamin and Brett J. Gilbert; for 2 players, about 10+ years; duration: about 20 minutes; price: about 22 €.



Moneybags

MONEYBAGS has been conceived in keeping with the principle, "A minimum of rules overhead, a maximum of interaction." To begin

he now has fewer coins in his bag than the other player. This is checked immediately; after that, the richer player is eliminated, whereas the other one rakes in all the coins. Alternatively, you can just wait when it's your turn, or, literally, "close the bag."

In the end, the player with the thickest bag wins, naturally. In most cases, it is unclear where the fake diamond is – the piece that is often decisive for the win. Bluffing and assessing are in demand. Everybody is watching everybody else; the tension is crackling. The later you have your turn, the better. Therefore, fans play three games, starting with the previous owner of the diamond.

The three best players score points after each game, and these points are added up in the end to determine the overall winner. Given the short playing time, an early elimination is tolerable for the players, especially since they can still enjoy the ongoing duels. What remains in the end is the question of how to put the 67 coins, the diamond, the point chips, and the linen bags back into the usual miniature box so that the lid still closes.

Christwart Conrad/sbw

MONEYBAGS (Oink Games) by Jun Sasaki and Yoshiteru Shinohara; for 3–6 players, about 10+ years; duration: about 5–20 Minuten per round; price: about 30 €.



with, the boss of the three to six members of a criminal gang distributes the loot roughly by filling each linen bag with a number of heavy gold coins. Plus, he puts the (very lightweight) "diamond," a transparent plastic gem that counts as ten coins, into one of these bags. You may not press and feel your own bag but you may hold it up and jingle it in order to estimate its weight and thus the value of its contents.

Over two rounds, players, in turn, can change this initial distribution. On his turn, each thug may challenge one of the others. To do so, he takes this player's bag and secretly steals any number of coins – but maybe he actually doesn't take away anything. The latter can make sense since the "victim" is then allowed to allege that he feels cheated and that

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Spies & Lies

More than 40 years ago, in view of my Christmas wish list dominated by Milton Bradley games, my godfather decided, "This boy needs something reasonable." So he gave me a real adult game: STRATEGO. With this, he probably paved my way to becoming a club chess player later on. When I positioned the blue or the red men anew time and again and speculated where my opponent's flag might be, that was a completely new experience for me.

The basic game of STRATEGO has been in existence for more than 60 years. Since then, the Dutch company Jumbo has had it in their product line and under continuous care, since the game still is a best-seller. The latest outcome of this is SPIES & LIES, a bluffing card game that – in reminiscence to its forefather – contains a small board with three little towers, a kind of scoring indicator. During three rounds, each player tries to advance a black tower ("Double Agent") six steps into his opponent's castle. If nobody succeeds in doing so, the player who has been able to move the black tower into hostile territory after round 3 is the winner.

The ten game cards per set show the well-known characters, such as the Scout, the Miner, the Lieutenant, the Bomb, and the Marshall – sometimes with French, other times with English names and uniforms. Meanwhile, there is also a female character, the Spy, among them.

The characters are numbered in ascending order from 1 to 10, and if you play them, they allow you to advance your blue or red tower the corresponding

number of steps on the so-called infiltration track. For every ten points, the black tower takes one step in the direction of the opposing castle.

Each round, each player sorts four cards in ascending order of the values and lays them out face down. Before a player reveals the card with the currently lowest value, his opponent may take a guess about the character in question. If he is right, the unmasked character is condemned to inactivity. After the cards have been laid out, an intel card gives some clues, requiring both players to mark all cards in a certain range (1–4, 4–7, or 7–10). And since one member of the troop (randomly drawn, face up) is always staying at the hospital and thus is unfit for action, a guessing attempt is not really just a shot in the dark.

These ingredients help you figure out the right solution so that you can land a hit with some deduction skills, luck, and knowledge of your rival. A successful tip also gives you two more infiltration points. The owner of the card may use the special abilities of the cards: The Miner can defuse the opponent's bomb; otherwise, the latter sends another character to the hospital at the end of the round. The Ser-

geant (value 4) doesn't need to be placed according to ascending order and may make wrong statements when the cards are marked. Lieutenant and General move the black tower right away, whereas the Marshall (value 10) succumbs to the Spy's charm (value 1) and leaves the game.

The familiar STRATEGO feeling quickly comes up in SPIES & LIES as well; but the new game does without the relatively long set-up time for the army. In most cases, one game with three rounds takes less time than the 30 minutes suggested on the box. The suspense of whether you guess a character correctly – or whether your own character will be able to act – is similarly high as in the encounters on the traditional board. But if you play SPIES & LIES intensely, you will – given the low number of no more than ten cards – soon know most of the tricks.

A team variant for three or four players is available as well; but in my opinion, it doesn't make sense. *Stefan Ducksch/sbw*

SPIES & LIES (Jumbo) by Don Eskridge; for 2 players, about 12+ years; duration: about 30 minutes; price: about 20 €.

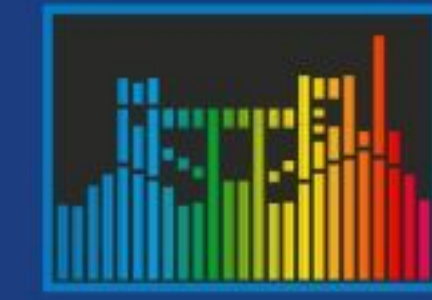


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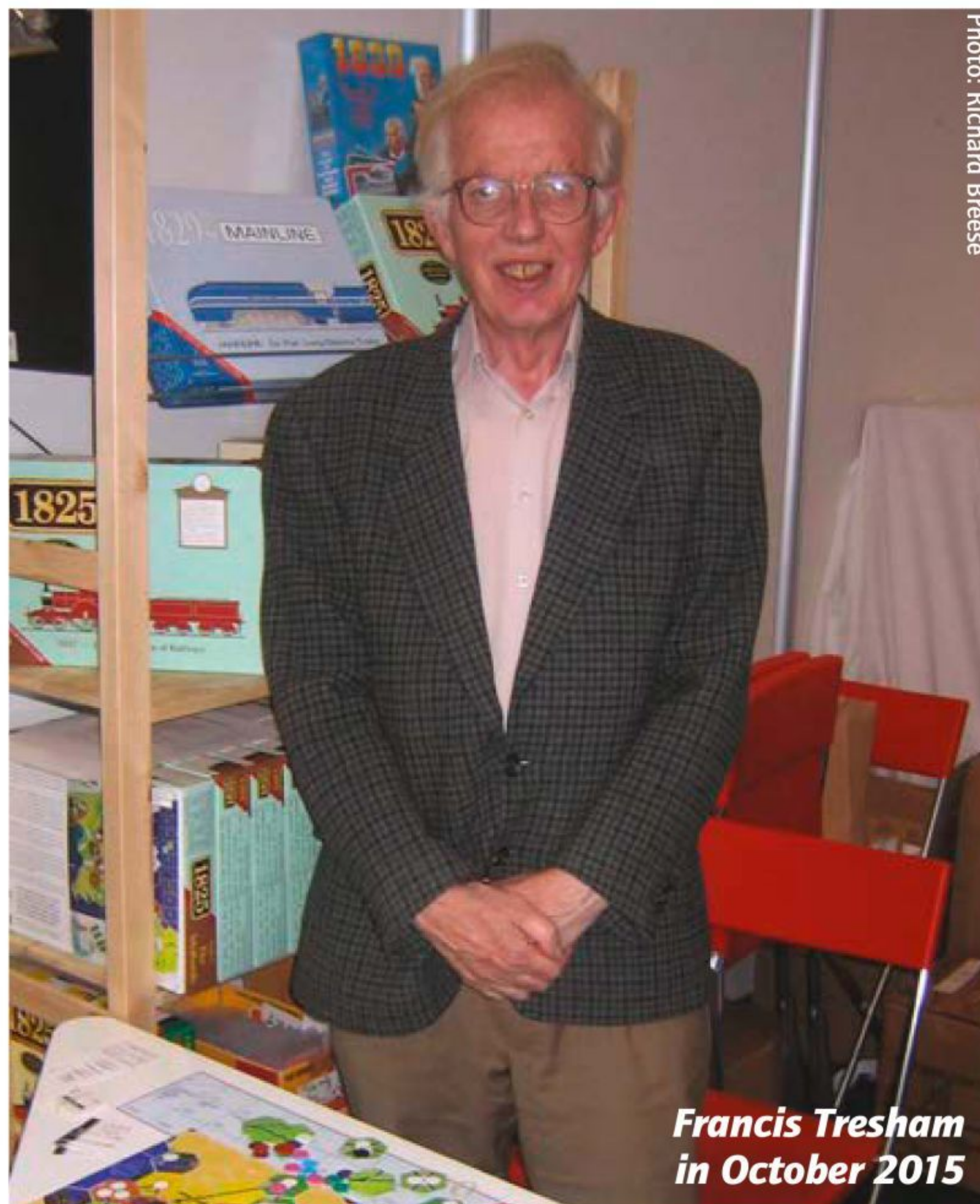
Obituary Francis G. Tresham

The question of who is the most important game designer of modern times is certainly as open to discussion as it is pointless, but the author of these lines can provide only one answer: Francis Tresham. There may have been others who were more popular, more productive and, above all, more economically successful, but with his creations that were revolutionary for the time, the designer of classic games like 1829, 1830, 1853, 1825 and CIVILIZATION has basically fashioned a new genre: Intelligent multi-player games for adults without a noteworthy element of luck that offer exciting entertainment well beyond wargames or sports simulations (the predominant genres for adults in the English-speaking gaming world at the time).

Francis Tresham began his career as an engineer; later he designed traction engines to move large components like turbines. These were all custom-built vehicles for special heavy haulage, where the cost of the vehicle itself was negligible compared to the millions of dollars that the transported goods were worth. It was never quite clear whether he gave up this job to devote himself to his passion for developing sophisticated games, or whether the decline of the British economy, which no longer manufactured these large components, would have forced him to take this step at some point. In any case, Francis became self-employed in the early 1970s, founding the publishing house Hartland Trefoil.

A gaming revelation was the 1974 railway game 1829, the foundation of what is today a whole series of adaptations featuring as 18xx games. This was followed by the abstract THE GAME OF ANCIENT KINGDOMS (1975), CIVILIZATION (1980), which might perhaps be regarded as the ancestor of the so-called euro games, and SPANISH MAIN (1983). Even with the inclusion of SHOCKS & SCARES, published by Gibsons in 1983 (without the designer given on the box), the Tresham oeuvre is relatively small; hardly any publisher or designer would be able to make a living from such few publications. Francis relied

on odd jobs, such as brief handover training sessions for canal boat charterers (essentially, showing them how to operate a lock, not very exciting). His wife Eileen, who always supported her husband's interest without being an enthusiastic gamer herself, contributed to the fami-



Francis Tresham
in October 2015

ly's (including their daughter and son) income by tutoring problem students.

However, the publication of CIVILIZATION was a turning point in Francis' life. For once, other publishers became aware of the game and released it under a license, despite its playing time of more than six hours.

The first licensed edition of CIVILIZATION was brought on the market by American publisher Avalon Hill, who also showed interest in 1829, provided it came in an American version. Francis welcomed the idea but did not just design a different map to meet the request: He completely reworked and adapted 1829 to the history of the US railway, marked by the unscrupulous acts of the companies' presidents, who exploited the competition as well as their shareholders for personal gain. Unfortunately, though, the time pressure from Avalon Hill caused a lot of stress for Francis and his play testers. The game's success, after it finally appeared in 1986, was to compensate him for that, although 1830 never was gentleman Tresham's favorite brainchild.

In 1989, he published 1853 (India), which was a by-product, so to say. It was already play tested during the development of 1830, as a reward for the Hartland Trefoil play testers after their exhausting work for Avalon Hill.

Even more important than 1830 for the success of the entire 18xx series was the Michael Maier-Bachl game 1835, published by Hans im Glück. Despite being a true offspring of the game family, it reached a larger audience than its predecessors.

The end of Hartland was by no means the publisher's fault, but the result of a crazy conflict over CIVILIZATION. The game was still available on the American market, under the Avalon Hill license, when Sid Meier's Microprose, certainly also influenced by the board game, launched a computer game under the same title. The ensuing legal dispute between Avalon Hill and Microprose would definitely be worth a board game in itself. More interesting here was the effect on Hartland Trefoil: It was bought without much fuss by Microprose. As the licensor was thus brought under control

for Avalon Hill, litigation became unnecessary. As a side note, it is interesting to see that Hasbro later resolved the problem once and for all by acquiring both Avalon Hill and Microprose.

For Francis, all this meant a good windfall. Life was finally about to begin for his family, after years of financial restrictions. A new house and various trips compensated them for difficult times. Francis did not really change – the success never went to his head. In 2004 – after more than 20 years of development. his last big game appeared in cooperation with Phalanx. REVOLUTION had the somewhat unusual theme of the Dutch civil war. Then things went quiet for Francis, probably because his play testers, who had loyally supported him over decades, died before him. Although the list of his games is short, some of them were groundbreaking, and having to make do without the designer – a truly original character – is painful for the board gaming scene. Francis Tresham died on 23 October, aged 83, of a viral infection that had spread to his brain.

Christian Klein/cs

Remarks on Spiel '19: Changes, but not back to the roots

Several years after the move to the western halls, the 2019 visitors of the SPIEL in Essen were again able to use eastern entrance which is closest to the city center. After the reconstruction of the exhibition center, they could now get from where hall 12 used to be via the new halls 8 and 7 to the exhibition booths. For all those exhibitors in halls 6, 5 and 4, this was more than welcome, as the routes of the visitor streams changed dramatically in their favor. Whereas before the masses from halls 3, 2 and 1 gradually spilled over into the area beyond the Galeria over the morning hours, this year it was very busy there right from the start.

area. This definitely calls for action in the future.

The fact that all the halls of the exhibition center were available does not mean that there was something to see everywhere. For example, those coming in from the east were presented the impression of a North Korean food warehouse in hall 8, a huge empty hall. Anyone who had never been to the fair before – and taking the organizer's figures of 209,000 visitors as a yardstick, this could easily have meant several thousand people – may have been surprised by this spacious, ultimately unpretentious foyer. The good news: The fair in Essen still has enough potential to grow for many years to come. The bad

have been a good idea, quite apart from the fact that the organizers would have had to invest money to do so. After a short time, hall 8 and 7 would inevitably have looked a mess and not left the best impression on entering visitors either. A redesign of the layout of the booth spaces with free play areas in mind would have been a good idea – maybe complicated to achieve, but a partially new plan has to be drawn up every year anyway. The will to change something about the situation was obviously lacking.

Yet it seems that the organizers of the Spiel have realized that certain changes would suit their fair well, especially as it might be losing ground to other events like the UK Games Expo or Gen Con. In the long run, it never works to rest on one's laurels, in this case the steadily rising, favorably recorded number of new publications. Especially as there are more than enough of them already, visitors as well as the press could not care less about where and when a new game was presented for the first time.

The panels and discussions on a variety of industry matters, or offers such as the Educator's Day, on the other hand, seem to be aimed at creating a positive effect for the image of the Spiel outside of the board gaming scene. Enthusiasts would rather pass on them as the time required to attend would then be unavailable for other activities. Since time is at a premium, an additional day would be welcome, especially as the fair is now starting already on Wednesday with a Preview Games Night, anyway. This games evening on the eve of the fair's opening is certainly a step in the right direction, although its quality leaves room for improvement, considering the fee for admission. But why not also rent out tables for free play during the fair, like they do at Gen Con (see sb 5/2019)? There would be enough space for it for years to come – and judging by the amount of games you see being loaded into car trunks, also enough money in the pockets of visitors. While this would not mean going back to the roots, it would certainly improve the show. The spielbox for one would definitely book some tables and raffle them off to its readers.

Matthias Hardel/cs



However, there is a kind of supermarket principle at work here: Customers are initially directed to pass places they are less interested in. In the case of the Essen fair, this means: Season ticket holders, who are probably more likely to be looking for something out of the ordinary, were channeled via the western entrance through hall 3, which is traditionally dominated by the large publishing houses with their mass market offerings. Since there were no day tickets available at the western entrance, day pass holders, who might be more interested in the publishers in hall 3, entered the halls from the east. The inevitable outcome was a counter-flow of people, which was, just like in previous years, further hampered by the very busy Galeria children's entertainment

news: The opportunity this space offers was not used in the least. What began 36 years ago as "players days" would today be rightfully called "games shopping days", because space to actually play the games is at a premium. From the organizer's point of view, it makes sense – and for reasons of profit maximization, it is practically mandatory – to burden the exhibitors with the expenses for the actual gaming opportunities. In return, exhibitors can ensure at their own booths that their games, and only their games, get to the expensive tables. Other events such as Berlin-Con simply handle things better, as they provide just as much space for sales booths as for free play.

But to simply furnish the empty halls with game tables and chairs would not

Ab durch die Mauer: Memory skills no longer necessary

Recently, AB DURCH DIE MAUER rightly got the innoSPIEL innovation award. The seemingly magical movement of the ghosts through the walls remains fascinating even after the umpteenth game. However, when it comes to putting together your ghost's outfit, you are certainly required to have some memory skills – undoubtedly appropriate for a younger generation target group. But with increasing age, one player or another might no longer be able or willing to meet such a challenge. If you nevertheless want to experience the fascination of the floating ghosts, you can spread out the target cards face up next to the board. Now you get the fitting card immediately, without having to search different face-down piles for them. Keep the cards you got face up in your personal display. If a player enters the same space during the further course of the game, he simply "relieves" the previous card owner, provided the owner is not the only player with the fewest cards. Once all cards have

been taken, the player to grab the last card additionally obtains a (virtual) wild card that he can use as any body part. The player with the most completely dressed ghosts wins. In case of a tie, the tied player who is missing the fewest body parts prevails.

The procedure can be slightly modified in order to give tactical considerations more space. Now each clothes hunter has only two actions on his turn, but these actions are potentially stronger. Inside one room, you may take up to three steps. To acquire a card, you don't need to stop on the space but may also move across it. If you are standing on a space with an image at the beginning of your turn, you even get the respective card immediately and this doesn't count as an action. So you might now be able to collect several cards on the same turn. However, I would not like to allow a tactical renouncement (in order to protect yourself from being robbed).

Alternatively, you rotate the board, as usual, but now even repeatedly if no ghost

has left his space. As a third option, you may move a magnetic slider until it has caused a ghost to move. This can mean pulling out a slider completely, provided it doesn't result in any ghost movement, even if there are figures in that row. The slider can be put in at any position and as far as you wish, but only until a ghost has been caused to leave his space.

The other rules – e.g., that you may not jump over a figure or push it off the board by using the floor slider – remain in force. In the latter case, you might have to take your move back. Other than that, you still may not revise a move you already started, even if you have instantly recognized your mistake. However, you are allowed to check before your move whether your own ghost is standing above a magnet. Even in a conventional ghost move, you may enter a space so that you recognize what kind of underlay it has, which is unavoidable in most cases anyway.

Christwart Conrad/sbw

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